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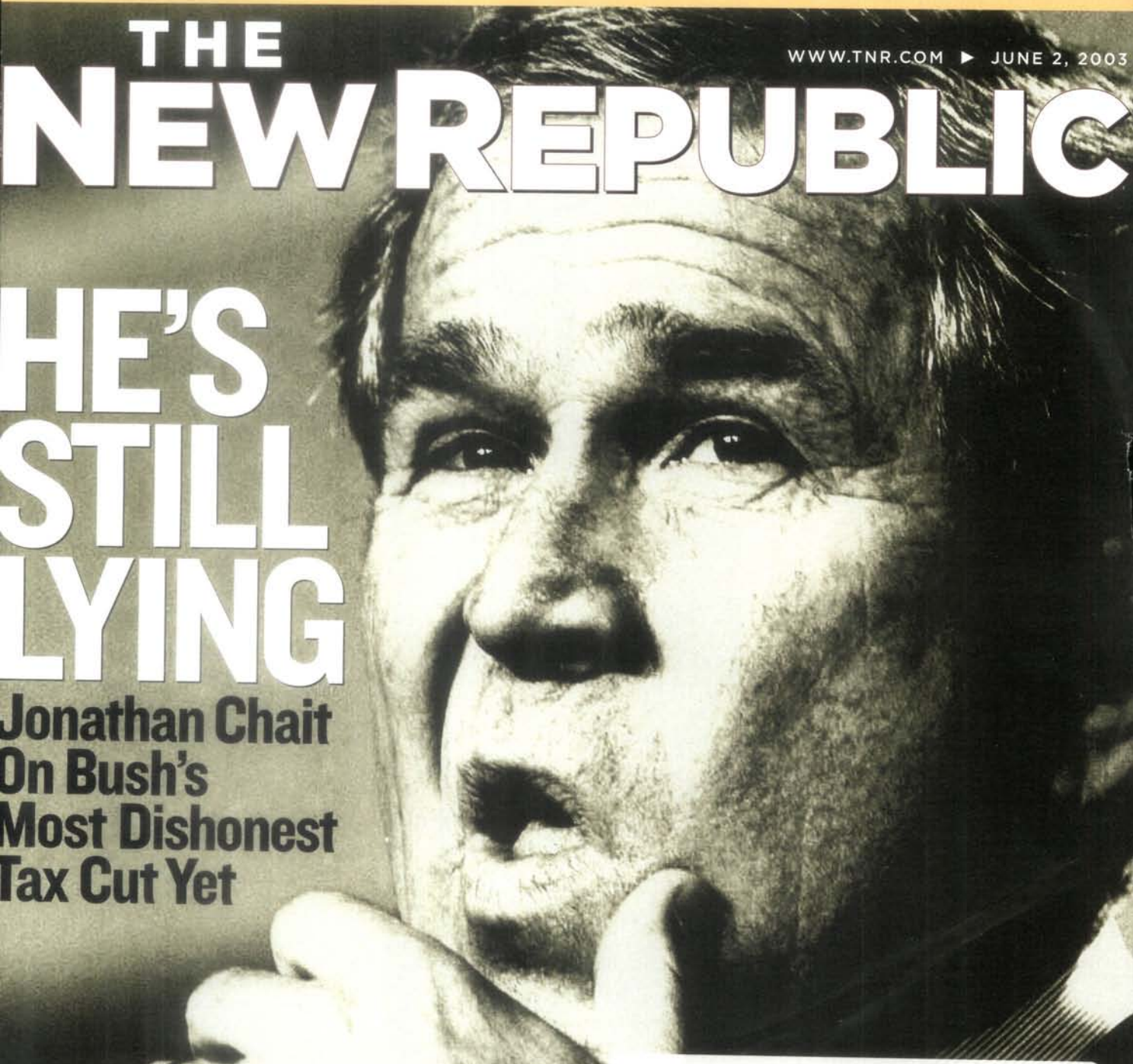

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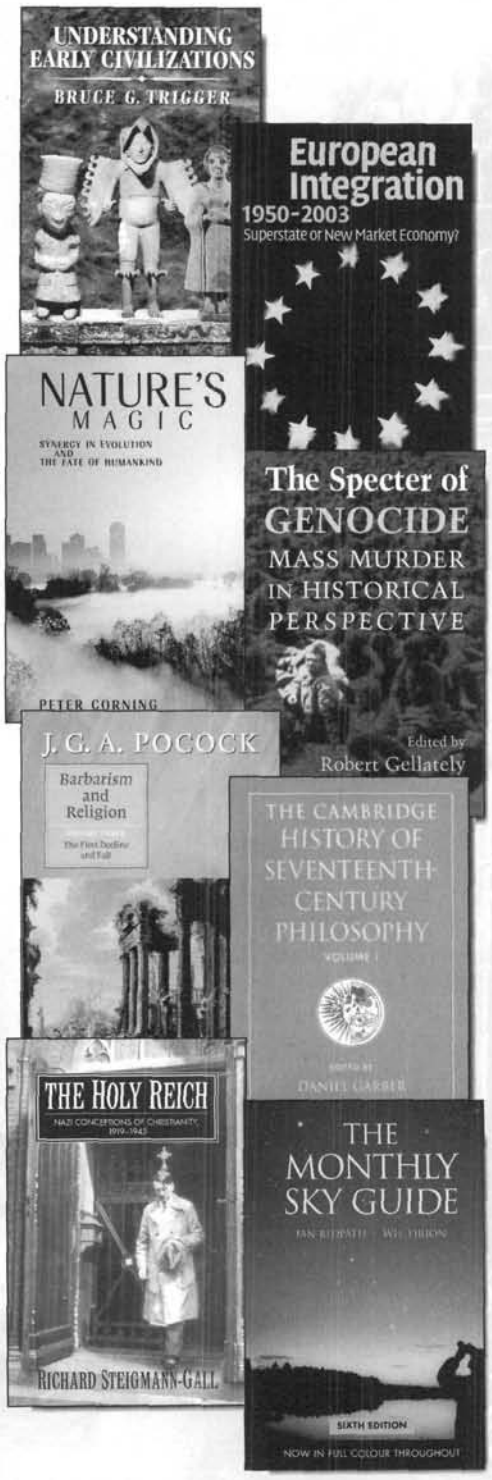

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CORRESPONDENCE

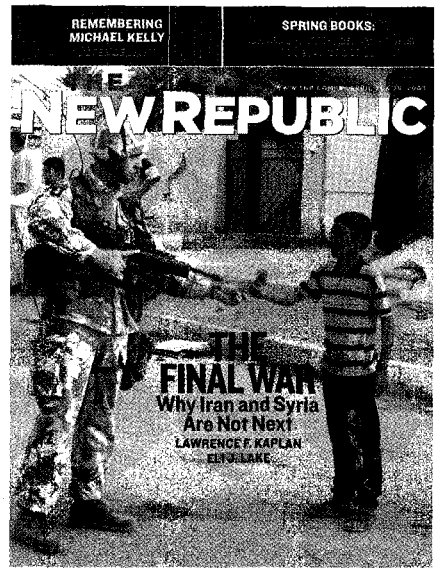
PSYCHOSOMATIC

IT'S SAD THAT IN THE ICON-BUSTING TNR, Alex Stone took the media party line, perpetuating the myth of Gulf War Syndrome (GWS) ("Ill Treated," April 21 & 28). Stone writes, "After 224 studies and more than $200 million in research, the causes [of GWS] remain uncertain," foregoing the obvious possibility that this incredible amount of research hasn't led to a cause because there isn't one. He lists six symptoms attributed to GWS, without noting that GWS activists themselves have listed more than 120, including hair loss, graying hair, weight gain, weight loss, athlete's foot, and even genital herpes. What's called GWS is merely any symptom any Gulf vet has or thinks he has.

Stone claims "experts generally agree that these symptoms arose from exposure to any of 33 toxic agents." What he really means is 33 suspect causes have been tested, but nobody has been able to pin anything down. Positive studies inherently involve a handful of vets, are rarely published, and are routinely irreproducible. Or they use amounts of agents that kill lab animals outright. Stone emphasizes that "roughly 30 percent [of Gulf vets] went on to file disability claims for a host of ailments," as if this were a surrogate for illness. Unconsidered is the possibility that so many have applied for benefits because activists and the media have convinced them that any illness they'll ever get is compensatory GWS.

Published scientific epidemiological studies have shown that, on the whole, Gulf vets are at least as healthy as non-deployed, matched control vets. The largest and most comprehensive appeared in the January 1, 2000, issue of the *American Journal of Epidemiology*, which matched the medical records of 650,000 Gulf vets to those of 650,000 non-deployed vets. Researchers looked at illnesses ranging from cancer to heart disease to mental disorders to skin problems for a total of 14 diseases. They further divided these by the three hospital systems involved, for a total of 42 data "slices." Statistically significant increased problems were found in five of the 42 slices. *But* the researchers also found significantly decreased levels of illness in eleven slices.

The media/activist game is to emphasize those few elevations while ignoring the disease deficits, as did Stone when he



referenced the study finding higher rates of Gulf vets with Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS). He didn't note that this study found merely 40 vets with ALS (with 33 cases expected) nor that studies both before and after found no statistically significant increase in the disease. Department of Veterans Affairs data also show death rates among Gulf vets are lower than should be expected, though the difference is statistically insignificant precisely because the numbers are so low. But, with the myth reinforced, how long before we're reading about GWS II?

MICHAEL FUMENTO
Senior Fellow
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Washington, D.C.

ALEX STONE REPLIES:
Michael Fumento misses the point of my article, which was not to enter a plea on either side of the medical debate surrounding GWS. Rather, I argued that the lack of comprehensive pre- and post-deployment medical records frustrates attempts to pin down the etiology of postwar ailments. Many studies have shown higher rates of certain symptoms among veterans of Desert Storm, but these results, including the ones Fumento cites, are only as good as the porous medical records on which they are based.

We do know, however, that these soldiers were exposed to chemical agents, such as sarin gas, oil smoke, and pyridostigmine bromide, which can harm humans. One in four Gulf vets is on disability—far more, percentage-wise, than any recent U.S. war. Does Fumento honestly believe these numbers reflect a conspiracy to float bogus disability claims or a national, media-induced hallucination?

On a more upbeat note, two weeks after my article was published, the Pentagon—under pressure from the Department of Veterans Affairs and The National Gulf War Resource Center—upgraded its post-deployment medical exams, an action that deserves commendation.

UNPREDICTABLE

I WOULD FEEL MORE CONFIDENCE IN the judgments expressed in Peter Beinart's TRB if his observation that the Iraq war "is proving harder and uglier than expected" hadn't reached my office scant days before Saddam Hussein's statue was pulled down in Baghdad ("Media Bias," April 14).

And I would feel more confidence in the judgments of the nation's military reporters in particular if, after the three-week politico-military masterpiece we have witnessed, just one of them would write a story headlined "WAR PLAN DAZZLES; THREE-WEEK VICTORY WON WITH MINIMAL CASUALTIES AND DAMAGE; RUMSFELD VINDICATED."

ALAN TONELSON
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Character Witness

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

TO CONSERVATIVES, THE BUSH administration is everything its predecessor was not: decent, ethical, honest. It doesn't abuse government power or the public trust. As *Wall Street Journal* columnist and presidential hagiographer Peggy Noonan has put it, "Bush brings character to the table."

That's the claim. Here's the record over the last eight months:

TEXAS

Since at least the 1960s, congressional redistricting has been governed by a simple rule: It occurs once per decade, following the national census. (The exception being when courts invalidate a state's redistricting plan, thus requiring a second one.) Usually, then, states draw the maps. But, when they cannot do so in a timely fashion, the Supreme Court has stated that judges may draw them themselves.

That's what happened in Texas in 2001. The state legislature deadlocked, so a three-judge panel drew new U.S. House districts. In November 2002, voters elected candidates in those new districts, and everyone assumed that would be that.

But those same elections handed the GOP control of both houses of the state legislature. And so Texas GOP boss and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay did something unprecedented: He redrew the map to create four more Republican seats. Republicans rushed the new plan through the state legislature until desperate Democratic legislators fled the state, thus preventing a quorum. GOP leaders then apparently urged Texas police to enlist the Department of Homeland Security in tracking down the missing Democrats. Now, the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* reports, the Texas Department of Public Safety has inexplicably destroyed all documents concerning this abuse of federal power.

Think this wasn't part of a national strategy orchestrated by the White House? Then explain the fact that Colorado Republicans have done the exact same thing. Last November, Republicans won both houses of the state legislature there as well. This year, they used their new majority to replace a court-ordered redistricting plan with one that guarantees them more seats. (As in Texas, the Colorado GOP did this by packing blacks and Hispanics into overwhelmingly minority districts. And you thought Republicans opposed racial separatism.) The *Houston Chronicle*, which endorsed Bush for president, wrote last month that such actions "would set a precedent for redistricting any time a Washington bully wanted to impose it." Beltway conservatives, by contrast, have expressed not the slightest concern.

FILIBUSTER

Throughout the Senate's history, its members have been able to block legislation through endless debate, or filibuster. Under Bill Clinton, Republicans filibustered the 1993 economic stimulus plan, campaign finance reform, and higher cigarette taxes. Now the Bush administration is upset that Democrats are filibustering two of its judicial nominees. So Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist has called for eliminating the filibuster as we know it. Breaking a filibuster requires 60 votes, but Frist proposes changing that so 60 are required only on the initial filibuster vote; subsequent votes would require 57, then 54, then 51. The filibuster, in other words, could be broken with a simple majority—rendering the device virtually useless. Frist has also threatened to employ a rare parliamentary maneuver to ban filibusters on judicial nominees altogether. Had the Clinton administration tried that during the GOP's (far more frequent) filibustering in the 1990s, I suspect conservatives might have said something about abuse of executive power. Today, they seem unconcerned.

IRAQ

Once upon a time, conservatives thought presidential duplicity was a grave offense. Not anymore. On October 7, 2002, President Bush declared in a nationally televised speech that "Iraq is exploring ways of using these UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] for missions targeting the United States." That was a functional lie. Iraq's drones, the Bush administration later admitted, had a maximum range of several hundred miles. They could reach the United States only if flown from a warship stationed off America's coast (a virtually impossible scenario given Iraq's almost nonexistent navy).

Three days later, the Senate authorized the president to use force against Iraq. And six days after that, the Bush administration announced that North Korea was enriching uranium to build a nuclear weapon. The news prompted a slew of questions about why the president was focused on Saddam Hussein when Kim Jong Il might represent a greater threat. But the North Korea revelation hadn't affected the Senate's Iraq vote because the Bush administration made sure senators hadn't known about it. For six days leading up to the vote, the White House kept Democratic senators in the dark about its North Korea discovery, preventing them from making a fully informed decision about one of the most important Senate votes in a generation.

Flash-forward to January 28, 2003. In his State of the Union speech, Bush noted that "the British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa." But, when the Bush administration handed over the documents that allegedly detailed Saddam's purchase to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the agency came back with a startling reply: They were forgeries. The Bush administration quietly admitted as much.

One sentence later in that State of the Union address, Bush claimed, "Our intelligence sources tell us that [Saddam] has attempted to purchase high-strength aluminum tubes suitable for nuclear weapons production." But, after investigating that claim, the IAEA insisted it too was false. The tubes Iraq had bought were far more appropriate for conventional rockets. Not everyone in the Bush administration was surprised—experts at the Department of Energy had been telling journalists the same thing for months. Confronted with the IAEA's conclusion, Colin Powell half-retreated, noting, "We still have an open question with respect to that."

These stories of Bush administration dishonesty and abuse have not been denied in the conservative press as much as they have been ignored. In researching this column, I could not find a single substantive defense of Bush's UAV claim, or his filibuster plan, or his uranium allegation, in any elite conservative publication. Fred Barnes last week defended the Texas redistricting plan in *The Weekly Standard* but, incredibly, never acknowledged the key issue: that states traditionally limit themselves to one redistricting per decade. For conservatives, it seems, this administration's decency and honesty are ideological axioms that require no empirical defense. President Bush is not President Clinton. That's all they need to know. **PETER BEINART**

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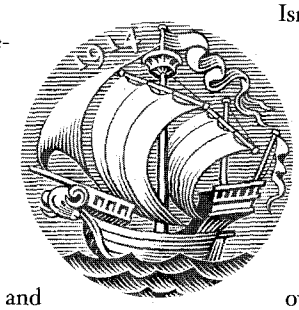
The Bloodied Map

OF COURSE THERE were five suicide bombings in Israel in two days. The danger of progress toward peace was in the air, and for the murderous maximalists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade there is no more terrifying danger. The political violence followed the "road map" as the night follows the day. And it is precisely the choice between night and day, between the darkness of their stateless and self-righteous misery and the light of their agreement to accept a Palestinian state that would live calmly alongside Israel, that the Palestinians now face. It is finally their choice—and not any decision that Ariel Sharon or George W. Bush may make—that will determine the political direction of their region and the life prospects of its inhabitants.

The decisive fact about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the "obstacle to peace" that is greater even than the settlement policy of Israel or the inconstant attention of the United States, is the internecine struggle in the Palestinian community, the civil war that has been raging for years between the jihadists and the secularists. What sort of society do the Palestinians wish for themselves and for their children? As a people, do they dream of going to Mecca or to Brussels? The so-called Al Aqsa intifada has been, to a considerable extent, the revolt of the jihadists against the secularists; and since the spineless and unprincipled Yasir Arafat was the apparent leader of the secularists, the jihadists have not met with significant resistance. Quite the contrary. Arafat had political uses for the crimes against Israeli civilians that he routinely condemned. He pandered not only to the mortal enemies of Israel, but also to the mortal enemies of a modern Palestine. Those enemies are the same holy and homicidal people.

In recent months, however, things have not been looking up for the Palestinian jihadists. The United States destroyed the rule of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and then it destroyed the rule of Yasir Arafat in Palestine. The Bush administration rightly took up the cause of Palestinian reform and eventually it forced Arafat to share power with a prime minister. The figure who usurped Arafat's power was Mahmoud Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, a genuine moderate who is serious about the possibility of a two-state solution. He in turn turned over the Palestinian security apparatus to Mohammed Dahlan, who is serious about destroying the wild and independent military capabilities of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. For this reason, Hamas and Islamic Jihad had to crush Abu Mazen, and there is no more efficient way of embarrassing, and even delegitimating, Palestinian moderates than by killing Israelis. Suicide bombings make diplomacy seem weak and irreligious, and they bring the wrath of Israel down upon Palestine, which is what the radicals want. They live by the principle that the worse, the better—in politics, always an obscenity. Israel has so far not responded to the latest outrages with brute force, but Sharon's closure of the territories, which increases the economic wretchedness of the Palestinians, and his open opposition to the "road map," which puts off the day of political reckoning, is exactly what Hamas and Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade desire. Their plan is working.



The Sharon government can hardly be blamed for taking a bloodied view of the renewal of a peace process. If Abu Mazen cannot restrain the terrorists in his community, then his rise does not really amount to Palestinian reform after all. If the Palestinian prime minister and his security chief are ever going to prove that they care enough about the creation of a Palestinian state to use force against the Palestinians who are preventing it, if they are ever going to demonstrate that their community will choose historical responsibility over ideological purity, they must do so now. Israel's skepticism is not based on nothing.

And yet Israel must not allow the provocations of the Palestinian jihadists to become all that it cares to know about the present circumstances of the conflict. With the elimination of Saddam Hussein and the neutralization of Yasir Arafat (if indeed he has been neutralized), the United States has fulfilled two of Israel's most cherished security fantasies. There may be elements of the "road map" that the Israelis cannot abide—and the sponsorship of the United Nations and the European Union is not the smartest way of assuring Israel that its understanding of its own safety will genuinely be honored—but sometimes one gets the impression that the rejection of peace plans has become an unexamined reflex, a cognitive habit, of Likud governments. This would be a terrible mistake. Thinking about security means thinking concretely, exploring every turn of events for the possibility of a way out of all these torments. There is a difference between vigilance and despair. ■

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NOTEBOOK

NELSON COMPLAINS . . . BUSH STAYS MUM . . . CHAMBLISS CHUCKLES

FOOL ME TWICE . . .

IN 2001, TWELVE SENATE DEMOcrats voted for President Bush's tax cut—many of them in the hope that their vote would insulate them from charges of being insufficiently pro-Bush when they ran for reelection in 2002. Alas, they found that their votes were no protection, as Bush campaigned diligently against them anyway. "His call for bipartisanship was just empty words," Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu told *The Washington Post*, "and he made that crystal clear through his brutal tactics of the elections." The moderates appear to have learned their lesson; few of the 2001 supporters are backing Bush's latest round of reckless tax cuts.

The lesson seems to have been lost, however, on Nebraska Senator Ben Nelson. Throughout the spring, Nelson endured a series of coordinated GOP attacks for not supporting this year's tax cut. The Club For Growth ran TV ads, the head of Bush's National Economic Council stumped for the cut at the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and an official in the Bush Treasury Department placed a call to the *Omaha World-Herald* that prompted it to criticize Nelson. As Nelson's spokesman told *The Hill*, "The legislative shop offered an olive branch to Nelson, and the political shop rips the olive branch and sticks it in his eye." But the abuse Nelson received seems to have worked. Last week, he provided the decisive fiftieth vote for Bush's latest tax cut. According to Nelson, he did so because the White House promised $20 billion in aid for the states. Considering that the state aid will expire in two years and in return Nelson gave them more than $600 billion in almost certainly permanent tax cuts, this may be the worst terms-of-trade imbalance since Indians sold Manhattan to the Dutch for $24 worth of trinkets and supplies. Congratulations, Senator Nelson. The White House is bound to respect you now.

Ben Nelson

IS STOCKHOLM SYNDROME CONTAGIOUS?

"TO AN AMAZING DEGREE, THE Baghdad-based press corps avoids writing about or filming the friendly dealings between U.S. forces here and the local population. . . . Instead you read story after story about the supposed fury of Baghdadis at the Americans for allowing the breakdown of law and order in their city. . . . Perhaps this is just another case of reporters with an anti-American or antiwar agenda. Perhaps living in Saddam's totalitarian Baghdad has left some of the press here with a case of Stockholm syndrome."—"Bad Reporting in Baghdad" by Jonathan Foreman, *The Weekly Standard*, May 12

"These [American] solders see the reservoir of goodwill draining away while bureaucrats take their time holding meetings and making plans as if time were somehow not an issue. They fear that their successors here will face an intifada in the summer if power, water, medicine, gasoline, and food don't start reaching Iraqi civilians."—"Disaster in Waiting" by, yes, Jonathan Foreman, *The New York Post*, May 16

9/10 PRESIDENCY WATCH, CONT'D

"FOREIGN TERRORISTS COULD EXploit, and appear to have exploited in limited cases, the general availability of firearms in the United States to carry out terrorist attacks." So concluded a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report released this week. For example, as *The Washington Post* notes, the FBI has arrested a Michigan man who bought weapons for Hezbollah and a Seattle man who allegedly intended to set up an Al Qaeda training camp in Oregon. Now obviously there may always be some loopholes that make it possible for terrorists to acquire firearms in the United States. But the CRS report comes at a moment when the mother of all loopholes is likely to open up for the first time in a decade.

We refer, of course, to the 1994 assault-weapons ban, which House Republicans seem poised to let expire. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay claims "the votes in the House are not there" for an extension of the ban, slated to end next year, and that he has no intention of bringing it up for a vote. President Bush, meanwhile, who supported the ban in 2000, appears willing to let it expire quietly as well. "If the president demands we pass it, that would change the dynamics considerably," a House GOP leadership aide told the *Post* before adding, "The White House does not want us [to bring it up for a vote]." Memo to Al Qaeda: Place your TEC-9 and AK-47 orders early. The ban expires September 14, 2004.

MOTHER OF ALL CONDESCENSION

"AS THE MOTHER OF A TEENAGE daughter, I know, if you don't set limits around children, they'll test you,

DAVID COWLES

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and we should have predicted that there would be the looting or at least more looting than we foresaw."—Representative Jane Harman, explaining that the administration was unprepared for postwar Iraq, NBC's "Meet The Press," May 18

FRIENDS

TNR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR DAVID Grann's recent profile of Bill Frist in *The New York Times Magazine* was excellent in many ways, not least for the revealing glimpse it offered of the unseemly donor-reward system of Washington politics. With Grann present, Frist took a speakerphone call from freshman GOP Senator Saxby Chambliss, who relayed a fund-raiser's request to be considered for an overseas diplomatic post. "I don't even know what the hell [the job] is, but he wants it," Chambliss said. Frist cut right to the vulgar chase. "He has lots of dollar figures down there?" he asked. "That's exactly right," Chambliss replied. "And he did raise a chunk of money for me." "All right," Frist concluded, adding with unintentional irony, "You're a good man."

But perhaps as bad as the conversation itself has been Chambliss's blasé response to its publication. "Bill and I are friends, and I didn't think there was anything wrong with the article," he told *Roll Call*. He went on to say, with regard to the practice of offering jobs to big donors, "For ambassadors, I don't think that's not to be considered"—whatever that means—"but this guy is a friend, and he's deserving of it." So selling public offices is OK as long as all involved are "friends"? One might have hoped that the episode would be treated with a tad more gravity when Chambliss appeared on "Meet the Press" last weekend. But one would have hoped in vain. When host Tim Russert, normally among the toughest interviewers in Washington, first asked about the episode, Chambliss joked that he'll now take care to ask whether he's on speakerphone. Ha, ha. And, after Chambliss explained that this particular donor never did get a recommendation from Frist—a mitigating but hardly exculpatory fact—he and Russert shared a good laugh over the whole episode. "To be continued," Russert concluded with a smile. As long as this sort of attitude prevails, you can say the same about the influence of big donors in the capital.

HOME NEWS

WE'RE MAD AS HELL AND WE'RE not going to take it anymore. We refer of course to the accretion of "spam" e-mails at the address we reserve for letters to the editor. In an effort to escape, even temporarily, such solicitations, we are changing the address for reader correspondence to letters@tnr.com. We apologize for any inconvenience we may thereby cause the Internet gambling, home mortgage, and prescription-drug industries. ■

Inside the Box | Bruce Reed

OLD DAYS Mimi admits affair with JFK after 40 years. Ken Starr's reaction: "That's the same length I wanted for my investigation."

LET FREEDOM RING United States indefinitely postpones self-government for Iraq: "We'll never find a contractor willing to bid on that!"

OUT OF ORDER Looting and chaos thwart U.S. efforts to rebuild Iraq. Condoleezza Rice: "I told you we wouldn't become the world's policeman!"

BETTING ON RED As CBO projects record deficit, White House looks for Mitch Daniels's replacement: "The only guy we've got who can lose money that fast is Bill Bennett."

SHARING THE WEALTH Now that Bush has cut their top tax rate, the rich wonder what he can do for an encore. Coming soon: the Unearned Income Tax Credit.

DODGE CITY Bush feigns support for assault-weapons law as DeLay insists it'll never happen: "Presidents don't kill gun bans; henchmen do."

THE ENEMY WITHIN Department of Homeland Security helps Texas GOP look for missing legislators. Ridge's defense: "Why should we go after Saddam and Osama when there are Democrats still at large?"

TWO HAVES Bush, Cheney report combined wealth of $25–100 million. "See, it pays to be against class warfare!"

STARR: UPI PHOTO SERVICE; RIDGE: KRT

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Campaign Journal

Dean.com

BY RYAN LIZZA

"Witches," says Joe Trippi. "And it pisses me off because they have people all over the world." Trippi, the fiery campaign manager for Howard Dean, is talking about Meetup.com, the year-old Internet service created to facilitate gatherings of people who share common interests—everything from knitting to Wicca—that is now the primary grassroots organizing tool for Dean. Trippi obsessively tracks the latest Meetup figures, and he has just learned that the number of registered Dean supporters has surpassed 25,000, far more than the next largest Meetup group, witches, who trail Dean by 10,000 but whose stats still irk Trippi a little bit. "They get their numbers all revved up because they get lots of people in London and Paris or whatever."

When it comes to the Internet, no detail is too small for Trippi. Some campaign managers devote their energies to working the elite press or courting union leaders or wooing donors. But Trippi seems to spend an inordinate amount of his time checking Meetup numbers, posting to liberal blogs, sending text messages to supporters who have signed up for the Dean wireless network, and otherwise devising ways to use the Internet to build what Trippi envisions as "the largest grassroots organization in the history of this party." And his efforts might actually be paying off: While many predicted that Dean would fade away once the war was no longer a salient issue, there is little evidence that the former Vermont governor's supporters—originally drawn to Dean when he was forcefully speaking out against war in Iraq—are deserting him. In fact, the Internet might account for Dean's staying power.

For the Dean campaign, it all started with the Meetup phenomenon. Back in January, the campaign stumbled upon the Meetup website and noticed that 432 people were signed up for a Howard Dean Meetup group. "We didn't really know what it was," says Trippi. He watched from afar as Dean's Meetup numbers grew to more than 2,600 in February. In March, Dean showed up at a Meetup event in New York City. It was so crowded that hundreds of young supporters were pouring out onto the sidewalk waiting to get in. Soon the campaign began receiving mysterious donations with an extra cent added. They learned that the Meetup community intended to raise $1 million for Dean, and the extra cent was being used to identify the donations. It became known as the Meetup Million Dollar Challenge and has raised at least $300,000 for Dean so far (close to 10 percent of what Dean had raised overall, as of April). Almost overnight, Meetup had become the Dean campaign's most important organizing tool.

Other innovations—wireless communications, HowardDean.tv (a website that runs streaming video of Dean speeches and events), a network of rapid-response bloggers—have followed, and Trippi is now doing more with the Internet than any other presidential campaign. Aides to some of the other 2004 Democratic candidates regard Trippi, who was born in Silicon Valley and has spent the last few years working for high-tech companies, as a bit of an eccentric who wastes precious campaign time e-mailing obscure bloggers and hanging out with political oddballs at the monthly Dean Meetups. "Some of these Meetup events look like the bar scene from *Star Wars*," says an adviser to one Dean rival.

But Trippi believes others will one day understand the brilliance of his plan. Consider the Meetups: Once a month, thousands of self-organized Dean supporters across the country get together at coffee shops and bars to discuss their candidate and ways they can help his campaign. This ability to get people to meetings, Trippi says, bodes well for Dean in the Iowa caucuses. "What do you do in a caucus?" he asks. "You go to a meeting." And Trippi has plans beyond the caucuses and primaries. He speaks of using Meetup and other Web tools to build a million-person-strong network of small donors who could raise the cash needed to take on President Bush. "There's only one way you could ever get to a million people in this country," he says before pausing dramatically. "That's the Internet."

One of the most important online vehicles for the Dean campaign is blogs. Just as President Bush has wooed conservative talk-show hosts, holding a special day for them at the White House, Dean is the first candidate to treat relatively unknown bloggers as a critical opinion-making constituency. "We understand the blogging community and have been active in it," says Trippi. "A lot more people are seeing us on the blogs and other sites every day than on TV at this point in the campaign." Forget CW-shapers like David Broder. Trippi spends his time reaching out to people like Ezra Klein. Klein, who was an ardent Gary Hart supporter, is a student at the University of California, Santa Cruz, with his own political blog. Ever since Hart decided not to run, Trippi has been trying to win over Klein and other Hart Internet activists. The Dean campaign immediately sent out a press release praising Hart after his announcement. "The fact that we really meant it matters to folks like Ezra Klein," says Trippi.

No liberal-leaning blogger seems to escape Trippi's attention. He recommends that I check out a blog called Daily Kos. "He's a Wesley Clark guy," says Trippi, adding hopefully, "I think his second choice is Dean." Last week, Dean even gave his first exclusive interview to a blogger, a rather well-done exchange via e-mail by the anonymous author of the blog LiberalOasis. The Dean campaign itself has an official blog that includes dispatches from the road, and Trippi also posts regularly to Dean2004.blogspot.com, an unofficial Dean blog that has become a hub of Internet organizing for the campaign.

Anyone who writes critically about Dean can expect his copy to be chewed up by this army of zealous Dean Internet

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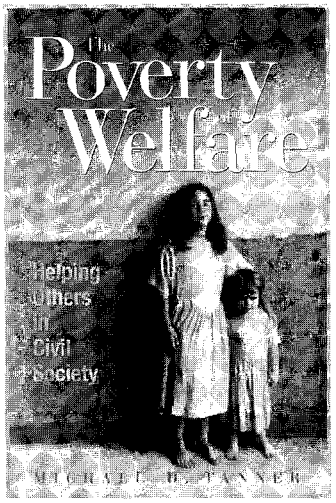

The Poverty of Welfare: Helping Others in Civil Society

Michael Tanner

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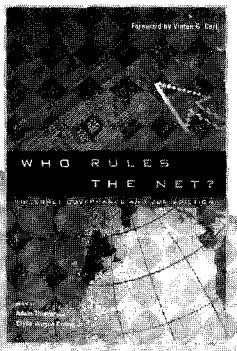
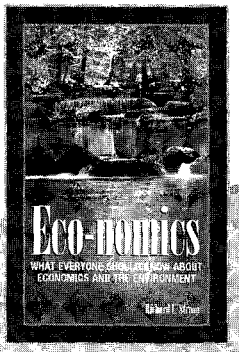


As the Internet becomes a truly global medium, governments across the globe have begun pondering parochial rules for it. *Who Rules the Net?* edited by Adam Thierer and Clyde Wayne Crews Jr., considers the threats to free speech and online commerce posed by government attempting to control cyberspace. 2003/300 pp./cloth $25.00 ISBN 1-930865-43-0



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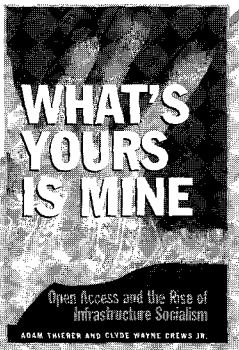

Open access, the policy requiring that a company or industry share its network, facilities, or specific technologies with rivals, is now viewed by many as the preferred method of regulation. Adam Thierer and Clyde Wayne Crews Jr., however, show how regimes that respect property rights–including the right to exclude rivals–better serve consumers and innovation. 131 pp./paper $12.95 ISBN 1-930865-42-2

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scribes. When I wrote a piece recently that contained a few paragraphs about Dean, a member of the Dean2004 blog team filed an almost 2,000-word entry slicing my article up into sections with labels such as "true," "false," "inadvertently true," and "foolish." Not content with this, the Dean blogosphere recently established a rapid-reaction team called the Dean Defense Forces (DDF)—an e-mail list of hard-core Dean supporters who swiftly push back with e-mails, letters to the editor, blog entries, and phone calls against anyone spreading anti-Dean sentiments. "When he gets attacked, we'll respond," pledges the DDF's organizer, Matthew Singer, a 20-year-old college student in Montana who once blogged about Dean on his own site, Left in the West.

The DDF's first mission came last week when the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) penned a memo condemning Dean for pandering to the liberal base of the Democratic Party. Trippi immediately responded with an e-mail activating the Dean network, and instantly the DDF and hundreds of other Dean fedayeen flooded the DLC with e-mails and phone calls. The Dean campaign later proudly posted 871 pages of correspondence that were sent, most of which took exception to the DLC's characterization of Dean as left-wing and his supporters as "activist elites." Dean himself cannily seized on the spat with the Beltway think tank to emphasize his outsider credentials. He also dug up old DLC quotes praising his moderate record as governor and tapped centrists, such as Jim Jeffords and Representative Zoe Lofgren, to vouch for his New Democratic credentials. By the end of the week, Singer sent out an e-mail to the DDF army declaring, "[O]ur first real campaign was a success."

THE LAST PRESIDENTIAL campaign that was this evangelical about the power of the Internet to raise money and build a grassroots constituency of new voters was John McCain's. After McCain won New Hampshire in 2000, he raised millions of dollars and signed up tens of thousands of supporters through his website in just a few days. But, by then, it was too late to make a difference. Trippi has studied the McCain phenomenon closely. The Dean campaign claims it already has an internal list of contributors or volunteers twice the size of the 25,000 supporters on Meetup. "We're at fifty thousand today," Trippi says. "We're ten thousand more than McCain was after he won New Hampshire, and this is eight months before Iowa or New Hampshire. It's not like it's standing still. We keep growing every day."

On the campaign's unofficial blog, Trippi recently posted a long, inspirational missive to Dean's followers about a confluence of forces he dramatically calls "the perfect storm" that will carry Dean to victory. Previously, Trippi argues, the Internet was not yet mature enough for any campaign to maximize its potential. Even in 2000, voters weren't as comfortable as they are today using their credit cards online, and the blogosphere was still in its infancy. And the McCain campaign wasn't prepared to capitalize on the Internet windfall when it occurred. Now, capitalizing on such a windfall is the basis for Dean's entire strategy.

Not surprisingly, the other force Trippi sees as essential to the project is the Dean persona. It's a cliché to compare Dean to McCain, but so far he's the only candidate in the race around whom a mass personality cult has formed. (How many people do you think would log on to watch DickGephardt.tv?) For months, Dean has argued that his supporters are responding to his personality and style, not just his antiwar position. That's starting to look more and more true. Of the hundreds of e-mails the DDF sent to the DLC, very few mentioned the war. To the extent any of them dealt with issues, they defended Dean as a New Democrat–style centrist. But most were nonideological, simply praising Dean for his passion and ability to bring independents and nonvoters into politics. "The only successful DLC candidate, Bill Clinton, succeeded not because of his policies but because of personality," wrote one Dean backer. "Dean is [a] real possibility for attracting people who were turned off by Gore's wishy-washy personality," said another. "Americans elected Bush based on who he was as a person far more that what his positions were."

The cult of Dean doesn't seem to be going away. His followers download and listen to the Dean dance mix, a collection of Dean's one-liners set to techno music. They stay in touch with text messages beamed to their cell phones. They attend their monthly Meetup gatherings in growing numbers. They fill Dean events with more bodies than any of the other candidates' supporters (1,200 showed up at a Seattle speech recently). They launch coordinated attacks on Dean critics. And they blog and blog and blog about the power of Dean's message. Maybe it's all a big waste of time, but Trippi doesn't think so. "In the way TV changed politics and took it away from the grassroots," he says with fervor, "the Internet is going to give it back." ■

Singapore Dispatch

Hanoi Hilton

BY JOSHUA KURLANTZICK

SINGAPORE DOESN'T BOAST the tourist attractions of some of its Southeast Asian neighbors. Unlike the Philippines, the authoritarian-minded city-state is not known for beaches—unless you count Sentosa, a man-made resort where the beach looks out onto an industrial port. Unlike Indonesia, it does not possess many historic monuments. In a rush to modernize during the 1960s and 1970s, Singapore's leaders tore down much of the city-state's older architecture, and today Singapore's best-known buildings are its gargantuan shopping malls.

Still, Singapore has one quality increasingly in demand among world travelers: safety, guaranteed by a regime that

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brooks little dissent. As terrorism and war have fostered global anxiety, authoritarian governments are luring tourists in droves.

Since September 11, 2001, fear has loomed much larger in many people's travel planning. Tourists have been avoiding nations linked in any way to terrorism and instability, which means that much of the Middle East is now off-limits. Tourism in Israel, for example, has fallen by 50 percent since the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000. Meanwhile, in Jordan, hotels are posting 15 percent occupancy rates.

The October 2002 bombing on the Indonesian island of Bali expanded the zone of fear to Southeast Asia. "Bali put the image in foreigners' minds that some parts of this region are unstable," says Simon Tay, an analyst based in Singapore. In the wake of Bali, travelers have shunned Indonesia, a nascent democracy rife with internal tension: Tourist arrivals to Bali have fallen more than 60 percent since the attack. Travelers also have reconsidered holidays in Thailand and the Philippines, emerging democracies struggling to respect civil liberties while combating militants—a struggle that has at times resulted in shoddy police work. Taking advantage of this policing void, militants have detonated bombs in the southern Philippines and in southern Thailand throughout the past two years. In the Philippines, visitor arrivals were 10 percent lower in March 2002 than in March 2003, while in Thailand tourist arrivals plummeted by 40 percent in April 2003 as compared with April 2002. When I visited the Thai resort of Koh Lanta two months ago, many hotels were empty. One resort filled vacancies by inviting high school students to hold graduation celebrations there—a desperate plan since teenagers are not known for treating hotel rooms with care.

Seizing the opportunity, several authoritarian regimes have positioned their countries as ideal holiday spots. "[S]afety is one of the things we're focusing on in international marketing," Nguyen Van Luu, spokesman for the National Administration of Tourism of Vietnam—a nation where security agents monitor households and where I once was followed for nearly five days by a security official—told the *Los Angeles Times* this winter. "[T]he reality is we are drawing more tourists because of terrorism elsewhere." "We can have an image as an island of stability in a sea of trouble," added Chan Heng Chee, Singapore's ambassador to the United States—stability that is achieved, in part, by making it difficult to hold large political rallies. Laos, a self-isolated nation whose government is known for surveilling citizens, harassing religious minorities, and putting prisoners in stocks, has also begun looking to tourism as a greater source of revenue. Whereas three years ago many roads in Vientiane, Laos's capital, were merely dirt tracks, when I visited Laos this March, the government had paved roads leading to tourist attractions and lined them with billboards sponsored by international companies touting Laos's tourism potential. Meanwhile, in Tunisia, where the president won 99.61 percent of the last referendum, the government has convinced the World Tourism Organization to help the country host more international conferences, where it can show off its fierce security efforts.

Even Burma, one of the world's most isolated and brutal countries—whose military has allegedly committed mass rapes of ethnic minority women—has launched a tourism campaign over the past three years promoting their new international airport in Mandalay, its second-largest city. As part of its efforts, tropical Burma has proposed building a ski resort in its northern provinces and even appears to have convinced the customs authorities at Rangoon's airport to treat travelers with more respect. When I was in Burma last fall, the normally glowering customs officers, who usually ask for bribes, smiled when I handed them $20 and offered me a receipt for my "gift."

These efforts seem to be paying off. In Vietnam, tourist arrivals rose 13 percent last year, and new hotels are opening in its major cities. Leading cruise lines have replaced cruises to the Middle East with voyages to Vietnam. "Vietnam is continuing to grow in popularity because it's perceived to be a safe haven," Sean Hunt, general manager of a hotel project in Saigon, told *The New York Times* in January. "Usually we get four or five [Web] inquiries a day" from abroad, Tony Nong, manager of Vietnam's oldest privately owned tourism agency, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "Now we're getting 15-20 a day."

Other unpleasant regimes are keeping pace. According to the Burmese Ministry of Hotels and Tourism's most recent figures, arrivals rose by nearly 14 percent in the first eight months of 2002, despite the fact that Burma's roads are rudimentary. Toni Neubauer, owner of Myths and Mountains, a leading adventure-travel company, told the *Chicago Tribune* that demand for trips to Burma "has been huge this year." Meanwhile, John Koldowski, managing director of the Pacific Asia Travel Association, a Bangkok-based tourism research center, estimates that travel to Laos is rising, a contention supported by travel agents. And, according to *CubaNews*, a regional publication, Cuba reported record tourism revenue during the first two months of 2003. In fact, leading international hotel chains are expanding properties on the island.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT unwittingly abets these authoritarian regimes' comparative advantage. Since the Bali bombing, State has issued travel advisories rightly cautioning against visits to Indonesia but also overstating the threat in Thailand and the Philippines, which is actually localized to certain areas of the countries, by warning that "[t]he terrorist threat to Americans in the Philippines remains high" and noting that attacks might occur in Thailand. At the same time, Foggy Bottom notes that Singapore and Burma are relatively safe.

It is true that there have been no incidents of Islamic terrorism in Burma, Laos, or Vietnam. But authoritarian countries face a different, unappreciated source of tourism-threatening instability: their own people. Over the past six years, Thailand has peacefully weathered an economic crisis and changed parliament twice. But, in the past six months,

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gunmen have attacked several buses outside Vientiane, killing more than 20 people, including at least two tourists. Diplomats in Vientiane believe the bus killings were the work of anti-government forces. Meanwhile, Burma has been rocked this year by bombings the government blamed on ethnic minority groups unhappy with centralized rule. And, in Vietnam, ethnic minorities recently have launched a wave of protests over religious freedom and land rights. Sure, democracies may be vulnerable to terrorism. But dictatorships are no day at the beach, either. ■

Will the Saudis go nuclear?

Royal Pain

BY MICHAEL LEVI

IN THE WAKE of September 11, 2001, and last week's terrorist bombings in Riyadh, America's relationship with Saudi Arabia has sunk to new lows. On the right, neoconservatives rail against Saudi support for extremist Islam and fume over the kingdom's refusal to allow American airmen to fly sorties from Prince Sultan Air Base during the Afghan war. The conservative magazine *Commentary* recently ran an article titled "OUR ENEMIES, THE SAUDIS," while *The Wall Street Journal*'s editorial page has blasted the Saudis for funneling money to militant Islamists. For their part, liberals point to Saudi Arabia's lack of political freedom as evidence that America's realpolitik-based Middle East policy is morally corrupt: This month, *The Washington Post* editorial page took the Bush administration to task for not citing Saudi Arabia as a violator of human rights and religious freedoms. In fact, hawks and doves who disagree about virtually everything else agree that the United States would be better off without its Saudi "ally." "I think we're heading for a divorce," Youssef Ibrahim, former head of a Council on Foreign Relations task force on U.S.-Saudi relations, told *Business Week* last year.

Realists counter that the United States needs Saudi oil and Saudi military bases. But there's a less obvious argument for making sure the long-standing Washington-Riyadh partnership doesn't fracture: If it does, the Saudis might well go nuclear.

Saudi Arabia could develop a nuclear arsenal relatively quickly. In the late '80s, Riyadh secretly purchased between 50 and 60 CSS-2 missiles from China. The missiles were advanced, each with a range of up to 3,500 kilometers and a payload capacity of up to 2,500 kilograms. What concerned observers, though, was not so much these impressive capabilities but rather the missiles' dismal accuracy. Mated to a conventional warhead, with a destructive radius of at most tens of meters, these CSS-2 missiles would be useless—their explosives would miss the target. But the CSS-2 is perfect for delivering a nuclear weapon. The missile itself may miss by a couple of kilometers, but, if the bomb's destructive radius is roughly as large, it will still destroy the target. The CSS-2 purchase, analysts reasoned, was an indication that the Saudis were at least hedging in the nuclear direction.

July 1994 brought more news of Saudi interest in nuclear weapons when defector Mohammed Al Khilewi, a former diplomat in the Saudi U.N. mission, told London's *Sunday Times* that, between 1985 and 1990, Saudi Arabia had actively aided Iraq's nuclear weapons program, both financially and technologically, in return for a share of the program's product. Though Khilewi produced letters supporting his claim, no one has publicly corroborated his accusations. Still, the episode was unsettling. Then, in July 1999, *The New York Times* reported that Saudi Defense Minister Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud had recently visited sensitive Pakistani nuclear weapons sites. Prince Sultan toured the Kahuta facility where Pakistan produced enriched uranium for nuclear bombs—and which, at the same time, was allegedly supplying matériel and expertise to the North Korean nuclear program. The Saudis refused to explain the prince's visit.

If Saudi Arabia chose the nuclear path, it would most likely exploit this Pakistani connection. Alternatively, it could go to North Korea or even to China, which has sold the Saudis missiles in the past. Most likely, as Richard L. Russell, a Saudi specialist at National Defense University, argued two years ago in the journal *Survival*, the Saudis would attempt to purchase complete warheads rather than build an extensive weapons-production infrastructure. Saudi Arabia saw Israel destroy Iraq's Osirak reactor in 1981, and it is familiar with America's 1994 threat to bomb North Korea's reactor and reprocessing facility at Yongbyon. As a result, it would probably conclude that any large nuclear infrastructure might be preemptively destroyed. At the same time, Riyadh probably realizes that America's current hesitation to attack North Korea stems at least in part from the fact that North Korea likely already has one or two complete warheads, which American forces would have no hope of destroying in a precision strike. By buying ready-made warheads, Riyadh would make a preemptive attack less likely. And, unlike recent proliferators such as North Korea, the Saudis have the money to do so.

Some analysts would argue that Saudi Arabia could enhance its security by undertaking a conventional, rather than a nuclear, buildup. But, as Middle East expert F. Gregory Gause III argues in a new Brookings Institution paper, Saudi Arabia's military is "weak in part by design, to prevent the internal threat of a military coup." Until the Saudi government is widely legitimate in the eyes of its own people—and that day seems a long way off—it is unlikely to build a large conventional military. By contrast, Saudi leaders might favor a nuclear arsenal, believing it enhances their

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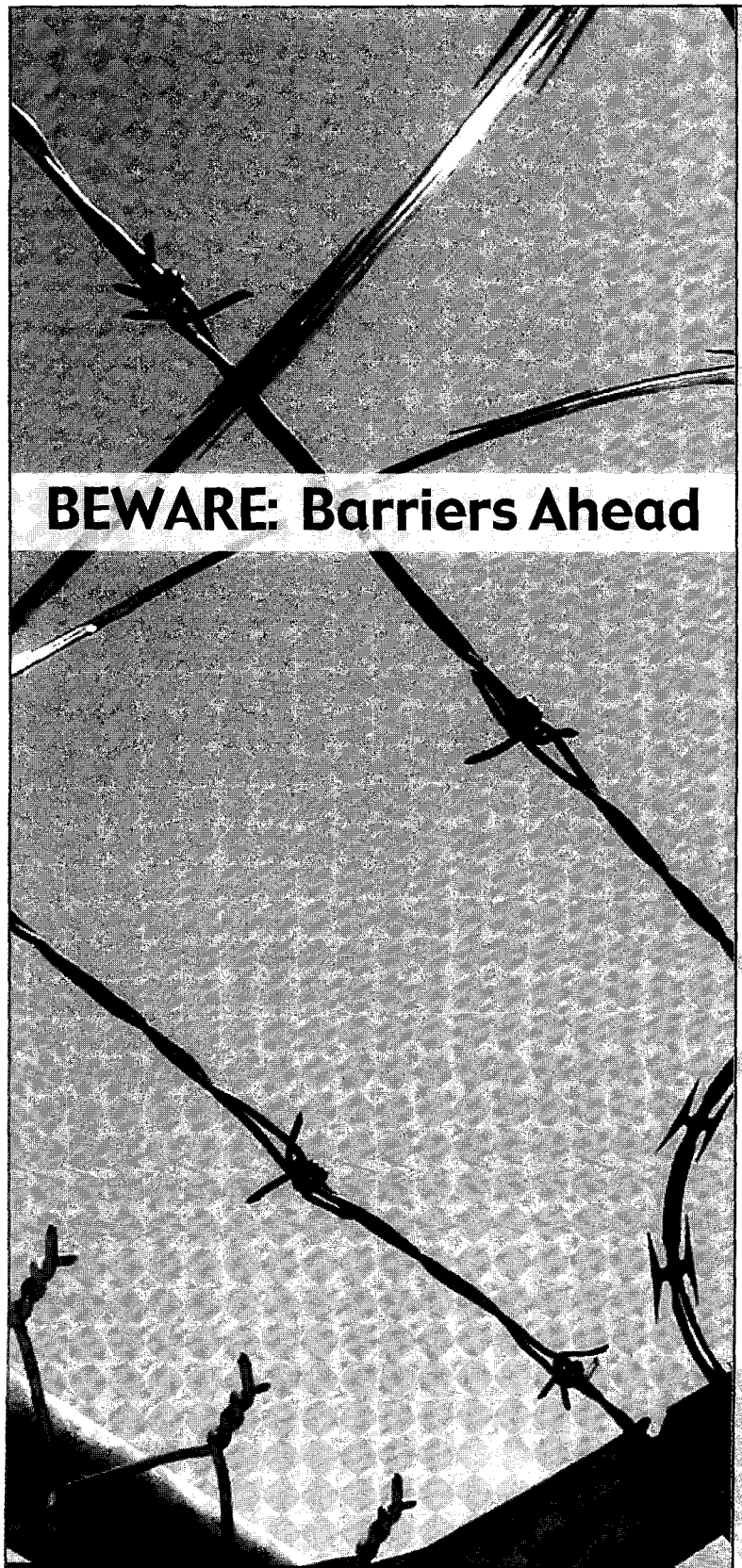

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security against external threats while being fairly useless to coup-plotters.

WHY WOULD RIYADH want nukes now? Because of a potentially dangerous confluence of events. The rapidly progressing nuclear program of traditional rival Iran has no doubt spooked the Saudi leadership. Last fall, dissidents revealed the existence of a covert Iranian uranium-enrichment program, forcing analysts to drastically revise down their estimates of how long it might take Iran to obtain nuclear weapons. Reacting to that development, Patrick Clawson, deputy director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, recently wrote that "Saudi Arabia is the state most likely to proliferate in response to an Iranian nuclear threat" because, he argued, the Saudis fear a nuclear-armed Iran could have designs on Saudi Arabia, a Sunni monarchy that is home to a large number of oppressed Shia. After all, Tehran has for years allegedly supported Shia terrorist groups operating in Saudi Arabia and was blamed by many analysts for the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing.

Holding back the Saudi nuclear program, of course, has been the kingdom's relationship with the United States. Though America has never signed a formal treaty with Riyadh, since World War II the United States has made clear by its actions—most notably, by protecting Saudi Arabia during the 1991 Gulf war—and by informal guarantees given to Saudi leaders by American officials that it will protect the monarchy from outside threats.

Since the September 11 attacks, though, that relationship has grown increasingly frail. When a RAND analyst last summer told the Defense Policy Board, then chaired by Richard Perle, that Saudi Arabia was "the kernel of evil, the prime mover, the most dangerous opponent" in the Middle East, he not only raised hackles in Riyadh, he reflected the opinion of many close to the Bush administration. R. James Woolsey, former CIA director and White House confidant, was even more emphatic in a speech last November, referring to "the barbarics [sic], the Saudi royal family." The recent decision by Washington to pull most of its forces out of Saudi Arabia, reducing its deployment from 5,000 to 400 personnel and moving its operations to Qatar, has added facts on the ground to the rhetorical barrage. This recent decline in U.S.-Saudi relations can hardly make the Saudi royal family feel secure.

Suddenly removing the U.S. security blanket just as regional rivalries are intensifying could push the Saudis into the nuclear club. That's a scary prospect, particularly when you consider the possibility of Islamists overthrowing the monarchy. Instead, the United States should be careful to maintain Saudi Arabia's confidence even as the two nations inevitably drift apart. The United States might even extend an explicit security guarantee to the Saudis, the kind of formal treaty it gave Europe to keep it non-nuclear during the cold war—and the kind of formal arrangement Washington and Riyadh have never signed before. Such a formal deal could raise anti-American sentiment in the desert kingdom. But the alternative might be worse. ■

Lessons from the British Empire.

True Lies

BY NIALL FERGUSON

WHAT A SCREWUP. One month after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, Iraq looks a lot closer to anarchy than to democracy. Looting is endemic because there are too few American troops to impose order. This week, 10,000 Shia took to the streets of Baghdad, exhorting the United States to quit the country altogether. And it is not only Iraqis who want the Yanks to go home. The other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council appear in no mood to give their blessing to a protracted U.S. occupation of Iraq.

Somehow, then, the United States needs to impose order in Iraq while at the same time relinquishing power there. The good news is that there is a tried-and-tested way to accomplish this. The experience of the last anglophone empire in the Middle East offers a road map for the beleaguered American occupiers. But it is not Britain's occupation of Iraq that teaches valuable lessons; it is Britain's occupation of Egypt. Iraq was a relatively late addition to the British Empire, run only for a brief period during the 1920s as a League of Nations mandate. Egypt, acquired at the height of British power in the 1880s, was different. The resemblances between Britain's occupation of Egypt 121 years ago, touted at the time as the model of what a liberalizing imperial power could accomplish, and America's current occupation of Iraq are uncannily close, and Britain's Egyptian experience contains critical insights for the United States today. Most important, the Bush administration—and the American people—need to understand that successful imperialism (sorry, "nation-building") requires a kind of willful hypocrisy: The United States must stay in Iraq for a long time, but never stop promising to leave.

IN 1882, A nationalist army officer named Said Ahmed Arabi seized power in Egypt, overthrowing the pro-British Khedive Tewfik. Arabi was no Saddam. And the pretext for foreign intervention was not the same as in Iraq today: violence against European residents in Alexandria as opposed to noncompliance with international calls for disarmament. However, the deeper causes for intervention are strikingly similar.

For a start, like George W. Bush on the 2000 campaign trail, the newly elected British government had pledged during the 1879 election campaign not to behave imperially.

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Liberal leader William Ewart Gladstone had condemned arch rival Benjamin Disraeli for meddling in Egypt and had made the avoidance of needless overseas entanglements a cornerstone of Liberal foreign policy. As late as January 1882, Gladstone was still advocating a policy of "Egypt for the Egyptians." But, like the United States in the Middle East today, Britain also had substantial economic interests in Egypt. More than 80 percent of the traffic going through the Suez Canal was British, and, in 1876, Britain had acquired a substantial shareholding in the Canal Company itself. What's more, a large chunk of Egypt's debt was owned by British bondholders—including the new prime minister himself.

A third factor reminiscent of America's Iraq war was Britain's initial expectation that any resolution of the Egypt crisis would need to involve the French, who also held Egyptian bonds and Canal shares. Since the Egyptian debt default of 1876, the country's finances had been under the control of a joint Anglo-French commission. Gladstone's immediate response to the Arabi crisis was to continue this cross-channel partnership. There was also a widespread belief that decisions governing what was then known as the Near East should be settled between all five great powers—Britain, France, Germany, Austria, and Russia, with Turkey (which still exercised formal suzerainty over Egypt) bullied as much as consulted. Great power conferences were the Victorian equivalent of the U.N. Security Council—and about as productive. Gladstone tried to secure international backing for military action against Egypt, just as President Bush sought backing from the United Nations. In both cases, the failure to achieve this backing, followed by the decision to act unilaterally, strained great-power relations.

Fourthly, as in Iraq today, there was no popular mandate in Egypt for a foreign occupation. As the future Conservative Prime Minister Lord Salisbury put it, "The Musselman [Muslim] feeling is still so strong that I believe we shall be safer and more powerful as wire-pullers than as ostensible rulers." Yet, once Gladstone had decided upon unilateral action, the British public was delighted by the swiftness of the military victory that ensued. The invading forces smashed Arabi's army in a matter of hours and with minimal British casualties. Even Gladstone was infected by the euphoric mood. "We and the whole country are in a state of rejoicing," he wrote shortly after Britain's victory. Indeed, commentators in London began to talk about imposing British rule not just on Egypt but also on neighboring Sudan, just as some hawks today propose that the United States now march into Syria.

The secret behind the British occupation of Egypt? Keep promising to leave, but don't.

HULTON-DEUTSCH COLLECTION/CORBIS

Finally, there was the postwar reconstruction. After victory in battle, Britain quickly realized that Egypt's finances could be stabilized only through sweeping economic reforms and that these would require an ongoing British presence. Just as Americans today assume they know how to handle Iraq's reconstruction and democratization, the British were convinced they knew what would be good for Egypt. As Gladstone put it in his diary, the challenge was "how to plant solidly Western and beneficent [economic and political] institutions in the soil of a Mohamedan community." That, it swiftly became apparent, could not be done overnight.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER CONQUERING Egypt, Britain began vowing to leave. After occupying the country, Gladstone remarked, "Should the khedive desire it, a small British force may remain in Egypt." By August 1883, Gladstone had made no fewer than five public pledges to pull the British out of the country, an example followed by his successors. According to Gladstone's biographer, Colin Matthew, these were only the first of "what were to be at least sixty-six protestations of the temporary nature of the British presence in Egypt" between 1882 and 1922.

Yet, even as they made these promises, the British stayed in Egypt—and stayed and stayed and stayed. Britain maintained a fiction of Egyptian autonomy until World War I, when the "veiled protectorate" was converted into a real one. And, although in 1922 Egypt was formally declared independent, in reality the British continued to call the shots from behind the scenes. Indeed, they regarded the country as a de facto part of the Empire until the 1950s, when the Egyptian army overthrew the pro-British Egyptian monarchy. As late as October 1954, there were still 80,000 British troops in the Suez Canal Zone—a military base the size of Wales. Only that year did they finally go home, seven decades after the original invasion.

By staying so long, Britain largely achieved one of the primary goals of the occupation—solving Egypt's debt crisis and reforming the country's economy. Indeed, the British administration of Egyptian finances had much in common with a modern International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment program. British administrators rescheduled Egypt's debt, balanced the budget, reformed the tax system, stabilized the currency, and sought to reduce corruption.

The results were a fiscal triumph. When the British took over Egyptian finances, debt service was consuming two-thirds of all tax revenue. Indeed, cuts in the army's budget had been a principal cause of Arabi's nationalist coup. By 1885,

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however, a debt-rescheduling agreement had been reached with foreign bondholders, and, by 1892, the debt crisis was over, paving the way for new foreign lending. Precisely because it was under British rule, and therefore guaranteed not to default on loans, Egypt could borrow abroad at relatively low interest rates. These loans helped finance major investments in the country's infrastructure, including the railway network and the first Aswan Dam, which greatly increased the amount of crops peasant farmers could produce. There was also investment in what economists today call "human capital": The proportion of Egyptians in school quadrupled during the occupation.

Britain reaped rewards from its presence in Egypt. Stabilizing Egypt's economy benefited not only the British textile industry, which had come to rely on Egyptian cotton during the U.S. Civil War, but also British investors, whose holdings of Egyptian bonds soared in value. Egypt also proved an invaluable strategic asset during the two world wars. It was from Egypt that the British waged war on the pro-German Ottoman Empire during World War I, and it was from Egypt that the British turned the tide in North Africa during World War II. Indeed, the decisive second battle of El Alamein, just 50 miles west of Alexandria, was a turning point not only in the North African theater but in the entire war.

From the Egyptians' perspective, however, the occupation was not such a success. In fact, Egypt's GDP per capita stagnated between 1913 and 1950, the result of the massive growth of Egypt's population and the vulnerability of its cotton exports to the vagaries of global demand. Partly for this reason, British rule in Egypt was far from popular. The Egyptian elites' resentment of the British monopoly on top government jobs bred the independence movement known as the Wafd.

Nevertheless, it was not until the '50s that the British were finally forced—mainly by domestic economic difficulties—to abandon Egypt altogether. How was this possible? The answer is that, by maintaining the fiction of Egyptian independence and by regularly promising to leave, the British succeeded in placating the Egyptian army, always a breeding ground for nationalist sentiment. After all, it was the army that had seized power under Arabi in 1882. Britain's artful system of indirect rule meant that another Arabi—Gamal Abdel Nasser—did not succeed in wresting power until 1954.

PROMISING TO GO while not actually doing so is of course a form of hypocrisy, and it is something all empires require. Indeed, only hypocrisy will solve America's current dilemma.

First, the United States must make it look like Iraqis are running the country. Indeed, L. Paul Bremer could learn from his Victorian predecessor Lord Cromer that it's quite all right to set up an interim ruling council of Iraqi notables and even to plan for a local national assembly in order to mollify local elites. But he has to ensure that ultimate control of military, fiscal, and monetary affairs remains firmly in American hands. This will not be easy. Repeatedly during their time in Egypt, the British had to resist the efforts of the country's nominal rulers to go it alone. In 1884, 1888, 1891, and 1919, the British were forced to sack recalcitrant Egyptian ministers. Anti-British forces sometimes fought back, and, in 1924, the British military commander in Egypt was assassinated. But the British remained in charge. In other words, it can be done.

Lesson number two from Britain's Egypt experience is economic. The United States must realize that Iraq's economic recovery requires not only troops but also an infusion of serious money into postwar reconstruction, just as the City of London helped stabilize Egyptian finances in the 1880s. Some American officials think that Iraq can finance its own recovery by boosting oil exports. But Iraq's oil fields are in dire need of repair and modernization. Given the country's current impoverishment, this simply will not happen without foreign investment. And investment in turn will not be forthcoming in the absence of an effective rule of law that secures private-property rights and a stable financial system that ensures a sustainable allocation of future oil revenue. Iraq, accordingly, needs something equivalent to the big loans floated by the Rothschild bank to stabilize Egyptian finances—which amounted to 50 million pounds between 1885 and 1893—in order to help resurrect its financial system. The trouble is that Iraq's existing foreign debts are daunting: more than $60 billion to foreign lenders plus another $200 billion in reparations claims dating back to the invasion of Kuwait. This is why the IMF—the modern equivalent of the Rothschilds—needs to help stabilize Iraq's finances and show foreign investors that they will not be throwing good money after bad if they lend to Iraq. In a briefing given in early May, Thomas Dawson, director of the IMF's External Relations Department, said the Fund was still collecting data and assessing a potential involvement in Iraq. That is not good enough. The Rothschilds moved faster in the age of steamships and telegraphs.

The third and final lesson is a diplomatic one. Like Gladstone, Bush is not so giddy with military success as to disregard international opinion. Just as Gladstone sought to reach agreement with France about Egypt's finances after 1882, so too has Bush had to beat a path back to the United Nations to seek a lifting of sanctions on Iraq and to offer the U.N. a limited role in postwar reconstruction. Like Gladstone, Bush needs to give his foreign protectorate at least a semblance of international legitimacy. Gladstone did so because he needed France's agreement to reschedule Egypt's debts. Bush has an additional reason. Without international legitimacy, the United States can expect minimal help from Europe when it comes to policing Iraq. The humdrum work of peacekeeping is, after all, not what most American soldiers are trained for. As in Bosnia, the United States should hand over some of the dirty work of patrolling and manning checkpoints to European troops. But that will only be possible if the Europeans get what they want: the semblance of an imminent U.S. handover of power in Iraq.

Note the word semblance. As the British showed in Egypt, you can keep up this kind of hypocrisy for quite a long time be-

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fore you actually have to restore self-government for real. Of course, hypocrisy is not terribly nice. It is, however, the only way the United States can reconcile its urgent need to remain in control of Iraq for the foreseeable future with the equally urgent need to appear on the point of departure.

Asked recently if he was worried about giving the impression that "the United States is becoming an imperial, colonial power," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld retorted indignantly, "That's just not what the United States does. We never have, and we never will. That's not how democracies behave." Gladstone would have approved. Saying one thing and doing another is precisely how imperial democracies behave. ■

The worst Bush tax cut yet.

Race to the Bottom

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

The Bush tax cut is madness. And it has been sold with lies.

TO UNDERSTAND HOW deeply the United States has descended into fiscal madness, compare the present situation with the last time GOP tax-cutters ran Washington, the Reagan presidency. Just like George W. Bush, Ronald Reagan used his first year in office to enact a series of tax cuts tilted toward the well-off that helped plunge the nation into debt. For this, Reagan is remembered by both the right and left as an unflinching avatar of supply-side economics. But, in truth, Reagan reacted to the consequences of his 1981 tax cuts in a way that would have put him far out of step with Bush's Republican Party. When the scope of the budget deficit became apparent, Reagan acceded to a series of tax *increases* in 1982 (in the midst of a severe recession, no less), 1983, and 1984. In 1986, reacting to complaints that his 1981 tax cuts opened too many loopholes for the rich, Reagan enacted a sweeping tax reform that liberals, including this magazine, hailed for making the tax code more progressive. Reagan's record on taxes, in short, consisted of one year of unvarnished conservative ideological warfare followed by seven years of retreat and consolidation.

The Bush administration's record could not be more different. This year, federal income tax revenue as a share of the economy is projected to fall to its lowest level since 1943. (It's true that much of this is a result of the economic slowdown, but it's also true that about half of the 2001 Bush tax cut has yet to take effect—meaning that, even after the economy recovers, revenues will remain low.) Yet Bush has not proposed raising taxes down the line, or even freezing future tax cuts, but rather is cutting them even more. And, far from evincing any regret for having tilted the relative tax burden from the rich to the middle class and poor, the president's new tax cuts are just as regressive as his earlier ones. Indeed, Bush—who cut taxes in 2001 *and* 2002 (a "stimulus" tax cut consisting mainly of business incentives and forgotten by nearly everyone) and is certain to cut them again this year—intends to cut taxes every year he remains in office, according to ally Grover Norquist.

There must be some theoretical limit to this administration's desire to cut taxes for the affluent. But there's no sign we have come anywhere near that point. The Senate, the only structural force that could have restrained the administration, has now passed a "compromise" version of the tax cut that is, in fact, more costly, dishonest, and less economically stimulative than Bush's original. In other words, we may have a long way to go before we hit rock bottom.

In keeping with its past behavior, the administration has concocted a series of public defenses for its tax cut that bear no relation to its actual purposes. There is, first of all, the usual attempt to put a populist face on a regressive measure. America's highest-earning 1 percent, who pay 22 percent of federal taxes, would receive 28 percent of the benefits from Bush's plan, according to the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy

MATT COLLINS

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Center. In almost every speech touting his plan, Bush dismisses objections to the distribution of his tax cut as "Washington, D.C., political rhetoric." He then cites a local family, typically earning around $40,000 per year, who will save more than $1,000 on their taxes annually. Earlier this month, speaking to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, Bush explained, "You'll hear all kinds of rhetoric about how this plan is not fair. Well, let me just describe to you what it means to the family of four making forty thousand dollars a year. It means their taxes would go from one thousand one hundred seventy-eight dollars a year to forty-five dollars a year. ... That sounds fair to me."

The clear impression is that Bush is fighting to cut taxes for middle-income families, and Democrats (along with some moderate Republicans) are resisting. In fact, this is the opposite of the truth. First, the $40,000-per-year family won't pay only $45 in taxes, since they'll still owe $6,120 in payroll taxes, which Bush ignores. Second, their savings from the Bush plan would come from three elements: increasing the child tax credit ($800), expanding the level of income subject to the low 10 percent tax bracket ($100), and reducing the "marriage penalty" ($233). These cuts, all of which enjoy broad bipartisan support, would only cost $157 billion over ten years—less than one-quarter of the total cost of Bush's plan. What have drawn real opposition are Bush's upper-bracket rate cuts and his repeal of the dividend tax, which will cost in excess of $500 billion over the next ten years and will benefit the rich almost exclusively. Bush could have won a sweeping majority for the middle-class cuts if he had dropped his insistence on the upper-class ones. But he didn't, because the former are merely a sweetener to help him obtain the latter. Indeed, when the Senate voted to reduce the size of the tax cuts, conservative Republicans suggested removing the middle-class provisions altogether so they could squeeze in more upper-bracket cuts.

To distract from the regressive nature of his plan, Bush has presented its centerpiece, the repeal of the dividend tax, as a matter of justice. "There's just a simple fairness issue on the double taxation of dividends," Bush told a New Mexico audience last week. "Listen, we should be taxing corporate profits, and we do. But, in this country, not only do we tax corporate profits; when part of those profits are distributed to the owners of the companies, small and large alike, it gets taxed again." It is true that taxation of dividends represents a kind of double tax and that single taxation would make more economic sense. The trouble is that Bush's commitment to the principle of single taxation is highly selective. Corporations have gotten so good at avoiding taxes in recent years that about half of all corporate income is not taxed at all. Bush's original plan would have exempted dividends only on corporate income that had already been taxed. But Senate Republicans changed that provision such that, even when a corporation shelters its income from taxation, it can still pay out dividends on that income tax-free. This represented an acid test of Bush's commitment to the principle of single taxation. If he really believed in it, he would have insisted that his GOP allies accept his version of the dividend tax repeal. Instead, the White House went happily along.

In recent months, the administration has hit upon another tactic to sell the dividend-tax repeal: Pitch it as a tax cut for the elderly. "If you're worried about the senior citizen being able to live a comfortable life upon retirement, then you need to join us in getting rid of the double taxation of dividends," Bush argued last week. "A lot of seniors count on dividend income in order to survive." A *Wall Street Journal* editorial made this case earlier this year. Pointing out the disproportionate ownership of dividends by seniors, the editorial argued, "That arresting fact has been lost among the Democratic howling that the President's plan is a sop to the rich. In reality, while seniors receive about 15 percent of the nation's income, Treasury statistics show they are the recipients of about 50 percent of the nation's dividend income." So, reasoned the *Journal*, Democrats claim Bush's tax cut goes to the rich, but in reality it goes to the old!

Can you spot the logical flaw here? Yes—it is actually possible to be both rich *and* old. This phenomenon has been documented in popular culture for decades, in the form of characters such as Ebenezer Scrooge and C. Montgomery Burns. And, indeed, the 11 percent of the elderly who earn more than $100,000 per year would receive more than 60 percent of the benefit of a dividend-tax repeal. And those old folks who earn less than $50,000 per year—that is, two-thirds of all seniors—would get less than 11 percent of the benefit. All of which suggests that helping Granny afford the early-bird special at Denny's may not be exactly what the Bushies had in mind.

But Bush's primary justification for his tax cut is not providing income support for seniors or middle-class families. It's creating jobs, which he calls the plan's "whole purpose." Speaking in Ohio last month, Bush asserted, "The package needs to be robust so that we can create more than a million new jobs by the end of 2004. That's not my projection. That's the projection of a lot of smart economists who've analyzed the package."

When Bush says, "that's not my projection," one might assume he means it's the work of an objective, nonpartisan body. In fact, the calculation comes from his own Council of Economic Advisers. So Bush's statement is only true in the very narrow sense that he did not personally construct the macroeconomic model that arrived at the result. Furthermore, while it may sound impressive, "one million jobs" is not very many. The economy has lost more than twice that number since Bush took office. With decent population growth, even a sluggish economy could gain one million jobs over a year and a half. To those few who follow economic statistics carefully, Bush's repeated promise of one million new jobs sounds eerily like the *Austin Powers* character Dr. Evil, who travels forward in time from the 1960s to hold the world hostage for what he considers to be the mind-boggling sum of *one million dollars*.

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The very notion that the government should take specific steps to counteract the business cycle derives from the theories of John Maynard Keynes, the patron saint of modern center-left economics. Keynes, in a nutshell, argued that a recession happens when the demand for goods and services drops, and, therefore, the solution is to get consumers to spend. In every speech, Bush casts his plan in classical Keynesian terms. As the president told a New Mexico audience last week, "My proposal is based upon this principle: If your economy is too slow, you need to increase demand for goods and services." Bush is right that tax cuts are one way to spur demand. But, in order to work, such cuts should put money into the hands of the people most likely to spend it—the poor, all economists agree—and do so immediately. Bush's plan, however, is disproportionately aimed at the rich, and, of its ten-year cost, a mere 6 percent will be pumped into the economy this year.

If the goal is to get money into the economy now, why cut taxes permanently? Conservatives say temporary tax cuts won't work because people won't spend their tax cuts if they know they'll be taken away in a year or two. But, if that's true, then having the government spend the money—the other Keynesian response to a recession—would be a better option. Indeed, if we follow the conservative prescription and ratchet down taxes permanently every time the economy slows down, after enough turns of the business cycle, the government will go completely bankrupt.

This is not to say Bush's tax cut wouldn't boost consumer demand at all. It would. While the rich don't spend as high a proportion of their income as do the poor, they do spend some of it, so giving them more money would presumably put *something* into the economy. The problem is that Bush's plan is wildly inefficient as economic stimulus. In order to pump some money into the economy today, it would require hundreds of billions of dollars in long-term revenue loss that will take place long after the economy has recovered. Economy.com, an independent research group, conducted a study measuring how much any given economic stimulus would boost the economy relative to its cost. None of Bush's preferred measures came anywhere near the top. One dollar's worth of extending unemployment benefits, for instance, would increase GDP by $1.73. Stretching the low-income, 10 percent tax bracket would produce $1.34. Accelerating cuts in higher tax brackets, as Bush prefers, would add only 59 cents for every dollar in lost revenue. And eliminating the dividend tax would produce a pitiful 9 cents of growth for every dollar in revenue loss.

The truth, as even Bush's supporters admit, is that his tax cut is not designed to cure an economic slowdown. The president's economic advisers are supply-siders. By definition, they do not believe in Keynesian, demand-side remedies. The recession, then, is simply a pretext for them to enact policies they support regardless of circumstances. Beneath all the mendacity used to sell Bush's tax cut, there is a set of truly held convictions. The trouble is that the honest rationales for Bush's tax cut are no more convincing than the dishonest ones.

SUPPLY-SIDERS BELIEVE taxes on income discourage people from working hard and trying to get rich. All economists believe this is true to some degree—nearly any economist would agree, for example, that the 91 percent top income tax rate of the 1950s was far too high—but supply-siders take this consensus view to theological extremes. By cutting upper-bracket tax rates, they hope to unleash entrepreneurial spirit and revive the economy, not just this year but for years to come.

Understanding why this theory is wrong doesn't take a deep familiarity with economic research, just a bit of common sense. In 1993, President Bill Clinton raised the top tax rate from 31 percent to 39.6 percent. Supply-siders predicted to a man that this would so discourage hard work and risk-taking that the economy would slow down and tax revenue would actually fall. "Higher taxes will shrink the tax base and reduce tax revenues," insisted a Heritage Foundation report. Of course, just the opposite happened. During the '90s, there was no detectable shortage of people trying to get rich. Innovation and entrepreneurship flourished, and the economy boomed, creating so much tax revenue that intractable deficits turned into surpluses. That doesn't prove the boom happened *because* of the tax hike, but it does make supply-siders' tax-rates-control-everything worldview look extremely dubious. There may have been a discouraging effect brought about by Clinton's higher tax rates, but it was so trivial as to be unnoticeable.

This experience offers a good baseline to judge the likely effect of Bush's rate cuts. The negative effect of a rate hike ought to be exactly as powerful as the positive effect of a rate cut. Clinton raised the top rate by 8.6 percent. Bush plans to lower the top rate by 4.6 percent, essentially taking back just over half of Clinton's increase. So, however much you think Clinton's 1993 tax hike harmed the economy, divide that in half and you've got a rough sense of how much Bush's tax cut will help—i.e., bordering on zero.

Of course, the calculation doesn't end there. On the other side of the equation, tax cuts increase the national debt, soaking up private capital that could otherwise be used for productive investment. That, all economists (apart from the left- and right-wing fringe) agree, harms the economy by draining away into government debt savings that could otherwise be used for productive investment. That's why just about every mainstream prediction—including those of private forecasters such as Goldman Sachs and Macroeconomic Advisers and that of Congress's Joint Committee on Taxation, which is currently directed by a GOP appointee—shows that the Bush plan would boost the economy slightly in the short term but would actually *reduce* economic growth after that. Macroeconomic Advisers predict Bush's plan would, in the long run, slow GDP growth by 0.3 percent in 2017. While that is substantial, it's not a huge amount. But, then, if you're exacerbating income inequality and burdening future generations with debt, your answer to the question of what you get in return ought to be better than "well, we're only hampering economic growth a little."

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BUSH AND HIS allies have three responses to critics who point to the negative effects of long-term structural deficits. The first is that tax cuts will, over the long run, boost economic growth to such a degree that tax revenue actually rises. This is the most extreme claim of supply-side economics, and Bush makes some reference to it in nearly every speech he delivers. "The way to deal with the deficit is not to be timid on the growth package; the way to deal with the deficit is to have a robust enough growth package so we get more revenues coming into the federal Treasury," he asserted earlier this month in California. But even the supply-siders who think Bush's tax cuts will cause the economy to grow don't believe it will bring about so much growth that revenue actually rises above where it would have been otherwise. Even Jude Wanniski—as rabid a supply-sider as ever lived—scoffed at Bush's free-lunch assertion last year.

A second defense, put forward by Bush's defenders but not by Bush himself, is that tax cuts will starve the government of revenue, thereby holding down spending and perhaps even leading to balanced budgets. (One notable thing about this justification is that it contradicts justification number one—either tax cuts cause revenue to rise, or they cause it to shrink; both cannot be true.) A good real-world test of this proposition took place earlier this year. We are facing the largest deficit in U.S. history, and revenue has dropped three years straight for the first time since the 1920s. Republicans control the White House and both branches of Congress, and all express a firm commitment to fiscal discipline. It is not an election year. The conditions for spending cuts, in short, may never be this propitious again. And what has happened? In March, the House proposed $265 billion in entitlement cuts throughout the next decade. This is nowhere near enough to balance the budget. It's not even close to as much as the *additional* tax cuts Republicans want to pass this year. Even that amount, though, was too high. House Republicans, under pressure from their own moderates, withdrew the plan.

Republicans imagine that deficits will force otherwise free-spending Democrats to eventually accede to major spending cuts. But recent history suggests they have it backward. The high watermark of fiscal conservatism in the Democratic Party took place in the late '90s when surpluses first appeared. Some liberals argued for expanding social programs, but the Clinton administration insisted on reserving surpluses for debt reduction. In fact, the very existence of high revenue offered the most powerful disincentive for spending. In the 2000 primary, Al Gore attacked Bill Bradley's health care proposal by arguing that it would undermine Medicare by weakening fiscal responsibility. The threat of "spending the Social Security surplus" served as a more effective political barrier against spending than any of the deficits of the '80s. Now that the barrier has disappeared—although no one talks about it much, this year's $400 billion (or more) deficit comes on top of the administration spending the Social Security surplus in its entirety—restraint has dwindled. Democratic presidential candidates are once again offering universal health insurance plans and are focusing far less attention on the budget (as opposed to the economy) than Gore did.

This development also illustrates the essential logical flaw in the starve-the-beast argument. It assumes that, as Republicans intentionally sink the country deeper into debt in order to shrink the government to the size they prefer, Democrats will respond by acting responsibly. But what if Democrats decide that fiscal responsibility is a loser's game? They might instead adopt the mirror image of the GOP strategy: Spend gobs and gobs of money, and hope deficits will grow so high that the Republicans will have to stop cutting taxes. To expect the Democrats to continuously put their sense of responsibility ahead of their ideological interests, while Republicans continuously do the opposite, is to expect a level of self-abnegation bordering on political suicide.

THE THIRD AND final conservative defense against the deficit hawks is that deficits will prove to be temporary or are otherwise insignificant. (*The Wall Street Journal* editorial page has even taken to using scare quotes—"President Bush's tax cut is running into trouble in the Senate, with opponents claiming they are worried about 'the deficit,'" it sneered in a typical offering—as if the entire idea were some liberal bogeyman.) In his stump speech, Bush asserts over and over, "We got into deficit because the economy went into the recession," and, "We have got a recession because we went to war." In fact, neither of these statements is true. The White House's own budget shows it running deficits into perpetuity, even after the economy recovers. And the war in Iraq imposed a one-time cost of $80 billion out of a deficit expected to exceed $400 billion this year alone. Do the math.

The administration does have a more plausible-sounding version of this argument: After the economy recovers, the deficit will be far smaller as a share of the economy than it was under Reagan. As Treasury Secretary John Snow told NBC's Tim Russert last week, "If you look at this budget, as a percentage of GDP, they decline, and they get down to well under one percent. That's a modest deficit." But the administration's budget forecasts rely on wildly unrealistic assumptions. They suppose, for example, that tax cuts slated to expire will not be renewed—although, such renewals are routine and the administration will assuredly fight to ensure they take place. They further assume that the Alternative Minimum Tax, a complicated system designed to catch rich tax-avoiders, will grow to the point where it raises taxes on tens of millions of middle-class earners—even though the administration has already promised not to let this happen. Under a more probable scenario, budget deficits should run around 2 percent of GDP or higher for the next decade. If more tax cuts come, that number will grow even larger.

That would still be lower than the Reagan deficits, which reached as high as 6 percent of the economy. Unfortunately, as the Brookings Institution's Bill Gale and Peter Orszag have noted, the nation is far less equipped to handle a deficit than it was 20 years ago. For one thing, the private savings rate has collapsed over the last two decades, from around 8 percent to almost zero; when individuals fail to save any money, it be-

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comes more important that Washington do it for them by running surpluses. A zero-percent private-savings rate combined with a negative public-savings rate (i.e., deficits) is a dangerous combination—it means the capital stock, which determines our economic growth, is continuously falling as a share of the economy. More important still, we're now 20 years closer to the retirement of the baby-boom generation than we were in the Reagan years. We should be using this time—after the economy recovers, anyway—to pay down the national debt and prepare ourselves for a big fiscal shock. Running deficits now is like an aging couple running up their credit card debts just as they get ready to retire.

Oddly, the entitlement crisis strikes the administration as a reason *not* to worry about the deficit. "Although the resulting deficits [over the next few years] are manageable by any reasonable standard, they are cause for legitimate concern and attention," contends the administration's Office of Management and Budget in an essay, "The Real Fiscal Danger," published last February. "But whatever judgment one reaches about the deficit of this year or even the next several years combined, these deficits are tiny compared to the far larger built-in deficits that will be generated by structural problems in our largest entitlement programs." This is a strange argument to begin with: Yes, we're spending beyond our means now, but in the future we're *really* going to spend beyond our means, so why sweat it? Moreover, its premise isn't even accurate. According to a calculation by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the long-term cost of Bush's tax cut exceeds the long-term deficits of Social Security and Medicare *combined*. In other words, if we rescinded all the Bush tax cuts, we could preserve both Social Security and Medicare and have money left over. So, if the entitlement deficits represent a "financial threat," as the administration concedes, what do we call the Bush tax cut?

NOT ALONG AGO, the kind of structural deficits proposed by the Bush administration would have provoked alarm among fiscal conservatives in the GOP. But, at least at the elite level of the party, classic fiscal conservatism is now nearly extinct. Consider the evolution—or, more accurately, the devolution—of the moderate Republican position since Bush took office. In 2001, Senate moderates such as Susan Collins and Arlen Specter initially advocated a "trigger" by which tax cuts would be postponed if the surplus did not prove as large as forecast. Once that failed, they settled for slowly phasing in the tax cut in order to cancel future installments should the surplus run dry. That is to say, they supported tax cuts this year only if we could be assured of paying off $174 billion worth of debt first. It appears this year we will fall shy of that goal by some $600 billion. Now, it would be understandable if moderates didn't want to raise taxes right now. But nothing in their prior position would indicate a willingness to cut taxes even further, on a permanent basis.

Earlier this year, it appeared the moderates had dealt a serious blow to Bush's tax cut when they voted to restrain its ten-year cost to $350 billion rather than the president's preferred $726 billion. Perhaps the most prominent advocate of this plan was Ohio Republican George Voinovich, who had made his name as a deficit-hawk mayor and governor and had voted against a $792 billion GOP tax cut in 1999. In a recent appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press," Voinovich spoke at length about the growing deficit and asserted that further tax cuts will "undermine our economy instead of stimulating it." By this logic, he should have opposed any tax cut. But, after yet another soliloquy against deficit-financed tax cuts, he concluded, "So the point I'm making is that this three hundred fifty billion dollar package is a responsible package." In fact, the point he made suggested just the opposite. Voinovich's incoherance undermines his self-proclaimed principles.

The other fatal flaw in the position embraced by Voinovich and fellow moderates is that the condition they demanded—holding the tax cut to $350 billion—meant essentially nothing. This is because in recent years the GOP has perfected the art of rapidly phasing in and phasing out tax cuts in order to lower their official costs. The 2001 tax cut, for instance, delayed implementation of many tax cuts and ended others abruptly. This year, Senate Republicans again made full use of such gimmickry, passing a "$350 billion" tax cut that, realistically accounted for, would drain perhaps as much as $1 trillion from federal coffers during the next ten years. Unsurprisingly, arch-conservative Tom DeLay gladly acceded to the "$350 billion" ceiling, explaining to *The New York Times*, "Numbers don't mean anything."

Take its most obvious gimmick: the decision to have the dividend-tax repeal end after just four years. Voinovich, pathetically, says this will "force us to look at what we have done and make us study whether it has an impact on the economy." In fact, it will do no such thing: The only purpose of the phase-out is to keep down the apparent cost of the tax bill; once the dividend repeal is in place, Republicans will argue overwhelmingly that allowing it to expire would constitute a "tax increase." How do we know this? Because that's what they're doing right now. As Bush told a California rally earlier this month, "[Congress] agreed to [cut taxes in 2001]. The problem is that they weren't going to let you keep your own money for three, five, or seven years from now." He makes it sound like an unwelcome scheme, probably cooked up by Tom Daschle. In fact, Bush's original 2001 plan had phase-ins, and Congress—with the administration's approval—extended the phase-ins in order to include the deepest possible tax cuts while still appearing to comply with its budget. Each tax cut, in other words, is mined with time bombs that must be defused (or else we'll have a "tax increase"), and each fix plants new ones that must be defused again. Bush will soon be back decrying those very gimmicks and demanding they be fixed by yet another tax cut.

It would be nice to imagine that, at some point, Bush's tax-cut hucksterism will be constrained by some feeling of shame, some sense of responsibility to future generations, or—the most fanciful wish—a concern for social equity. But, in George W. Bush's Washington, such quaint notions are all, from the administration's point of view, blessedly in remission. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Earthy and Airy

ANOTHER SAVORY FILM ABOUT Latinos in the U.S.A. Only a month after *Raising Victor Vargas,* which was hardly the first of the line, here is **WASHINGTON HEIGHTS.** The title is the name of a neighborhood near the northern tip of Manhattan where, as it happens, I spent my first seven years. The district has (putting it mildly) changed: now it is populated by Latinos, and this picture deals with a community of Cubans up there.

WASHINGTON HEIGHTS (MAC)

THE SHAPE OF THINGS (Focus)

The screenplay—by Nat Moss and the director, Alfredo De Villa—has a lively center and a set of subplots that do more than thicken the story; they give the community breadth and varied tones. In the center is Carlos, the twentyish son of a bodega owner. Carlos is a comic-book artist downtown. He has an offer to progress in his job just when trouble strikes: his father, Eddie, is shot in a holdup and is paralyzed. The only one available to take over the shop is Carlos, and this obligation stymies his comic-book career. Troubled, too, is his relationship with his fiancée, Maggie, a dressmaker. Further complications grow from Maggie's brother, a hard-nosed drug dealer, and Eddie's landlord, who has loaned the old man money. Further—yes, there is more—the landlord's son, a friend of Carlos's, has bowling ambitions and needs a stiff entrance fee for a tournament. He asks Carlos for help.

The curious effect of all this plotting is simply to make the viewer nod obligingly. If we are to move through this community, there has to be some story, doesn't there? The Moss–De Villa screenplay is like an old-fashioned opera libretto: complications have been arranged so that there are opportunities for arias and duets and trios and choruses. The "score" of this film, made possible by the libretto, is the world in which all these people live.

This is a familiar license in film structure, and, as usual, its success depends on the vitality of its characters. *Washington Heights,* under De Villa's guidance, bubbles. Once more, as in comparable films, it creates a foreign nexus in a domestic setting—a group of people who live in two cultures. These Cubans maintain their own ethos while they accommodate a new one. Chaffing, quarreling, scheming, hoping, they all seem to rely on one another's understanding that they are hyphenated folk, Cuban-American. (One aspect of their life—at least as deployed in this picture—is their attitude toward marital fidelity: it is apparently expected only of women.) The landlord and son are Irish-American, but by now they, too, seem part of this community.

The cast, all good and some better than that, includes one surprise: Tomas Milian as Eddie. Milian, Cuban by birth, has had a long and wide film career in Europe and America, and now this actor, who once played the leading role in an Antonioni film (*Identification of a Woman,* 1982), is the white-bearded, warm-hearted owner of a bodega in upper Manhattan. Very appealing in the part, too. Another exceptional performance comes from Manny Perez as Carlos. Perez has fire and verve in him and an impressive screen presence. He and the other capable Latino actors make us ask again where these people come from. Where have they learned their skills? And what are they going to do now?

The extra dividend in this film for me was the chance to see the streets of my boyhood differently inhabited. When I lived there, the only Cuban things in the area were my uncle's cigars.

Something over a year ago I went to a Neil LaBute play Off Broadway. After his two films, *In the Company of Men* and *Your Friends and Neighbors,* I didn't want to miss this gifted man's work in the other of his two domains. (I had also read his seething group of short plays called *Bash.*) The chief effect of the new play was irritation. It was mostly composed of the aerated though lightly portentous chitchat that often comes along in films about Bright Young Things. Well, at least I was done with that play, I thought. But now LaBute strikes back: he has made a film of it, *The Shape of Things,* and I have to deal with it.

I have to because this still irritating work comes from a man of acute talent. His first two films made me think of Restoration comedy in their light-fingered cruelty, and they were directed with apposite rapier skill. Then he directed, but only co-wrote, *Possession,* which was quite different, a romantic rippling of different time strands. *Nurse Betty* was much inferior, but LaBute's direction almost made Renée Zellweger tolerable. His work needs attention even at its nadir, which I hope this new film is.

Four students in their mid-twenties, two men and two women, are the subjects. Adam and Evelyn (cute names, alas) meet in a museum where he works part-time as a guard, which obligates him to prevent her from spray-painting a penis on a fig-leafed male statue. Philip and Jenny, engaged, are Adam's friends and soon meet his new girl. The rest of the film deals with the predictable amorous cross-visits of the foursome until the last scene. Then Evelyn, an art student, presents a piece of performance art that is meant to disclose a cool solipsism underneath her seeming affection for Adam. This disclosure changes all that has gone before into a bitter joke. *In the Company of Men* was built on a vicious egotistical prank, but the prank was integrated into the story. Here the deception, a last-minute surprise, is simply not credible. We cannot believe that it was in Evelyn's mind from the beginning. It seems an afterthought, a belated attempt to jam this flimsy play into the acerbic LaBute canon.

As sometimes happens with scripts of incessant wisecrackery, each of these four people seems to have a private gag writer who equips him or her for the day's duels. All of them compete, rather than converse, in snappy comebacks, decorated with a sprinkling of literary references. (*Othello* and

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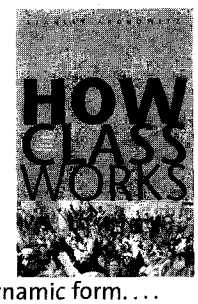

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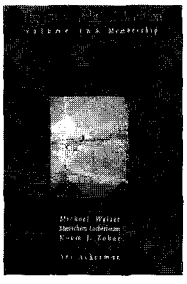

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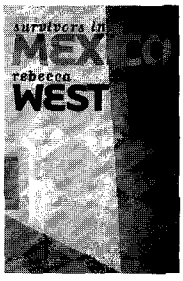

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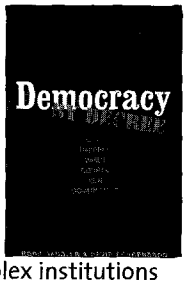

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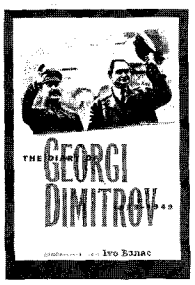

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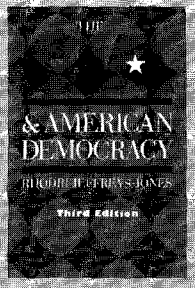

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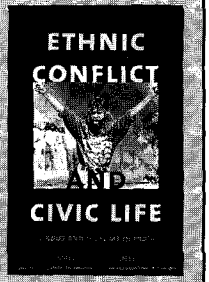

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Pygmalion are only two of the sources that we literate types are meant to recognize.) The four actors—Paul Rudd, Rachel Weisz, Gretchen Mol, and Frederick Weller—were in the theater cast of the piece and by now have been sharpened by LaBute in the self-interrupting, offhand, mercurial style that serves this dialogue best.

The pertinent question about LaBute is: has he now entered the Almodóvar realm? The Spanish writer-director first dazzled us with his slashing comic irreverence, but it dimmed in the course of time, during which he polished the cinematic skills on which he now leans more than on satire. Perhaps LaBute's early resemblance to Congreve and Co. is wearing down to the point where, trying to pay dues to his past, he slaps a wry finale on a conventional comedy. Will his tank of authentic bile refill? The most benign among us must long for it. ■

JED PERL ON ART

Raping Beauty

I.

THERE IS SOMETHING STARTLINGLY human about the plain-spoken gentleness and the determined attachment to civilizing ritual that you find in the statues of worshippers left as offerings in Sumerian temples more than four thousand years ago. Standing bolt upright, with their eyes wide open and their hands clasped tightly in front of them, these figures suggest a range of emotions, from bafflement to bursting consciousness to awestruck excitement. Coming upon a group of Sumerian worshippers in "Art of the First Cities," the exhibition about the civilizations of early Mesopotamia that is at the Metropolitan Museum of Art through August 17, you may be tempted to make a contrast with the far more familiar art that was beginning to be produced in Egypt around the same time. If the sculpture of Old Kingdom Egypt, which is so cool, so suave, so unabashedly virtuosic, reflects the disciplined emotions of men who were absorbed in an overwhelmingly centralized civilization, then these Sumerian worshippers, which were left in the temples as the magical expression of an individual's relationship to the gods, suggest a more spontaneous and heartfelt feeling. These men, with their wonderfully oversized and all-seeing eyes, are ferocious but also comic, careful of their dignity but also eager for experience. They are people whom we feel that we know.

ART OF THE FIRST CITIES
(Metropolitan Museum of Art)

The charged presence of the Sumerian votive figures, which has been recognized since these works of art were first discovered in archaeological expeditions to the Near East some seventy-five years ago, strikes with a redoubled force right now, because the earth from which these curious beings emerged is the earth of modern-day Iraq. As everybody with a television by now knows, the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad, for decades the world's greatest repository of Sumerian votive figures and more generally of the variegated riches of the civilization that brought them into being, was looted in the second week of April, in the wake of the defeat of Saddam Hussein, with catastrophic results. It is a coincidence that "Art of the First Cities," an exhibition six years in the planning, is opening only a few weeks after the sacking of the Iraq Museum, but this is the sort of coincidence that will lead many people to conclude that there are no coincidences. When this exhibition was in the planning stages, it promised to be a gathering of objects from far-flung museums that would perhaps, taken together, rival the gathering of objects in Baghdad. As "Art of the First Cities" opens, we are confronted with the ghastly possibility that some of the greatest treasures in the Iraq Museum may never be seen again.

In his autobiography, *Seventy Years in Archaeology*, published in 1932, Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie, one of the towering figures in the recovery of the Near Eastern heritage, observed ominously that "the perils of discoveries are by no means over when they reach a museum." Time and again, Flinders Petrie found that almost as soon as he deposited objects with the proper authorities, they were ruined through mistreatment or neglect or spirited away into the black market. But the mismanagement and the chicanery that he recorded pales in comparison with what has now unfolded in Baghdad. It is not clear to what degree the looting of the museum was a part of the more general ravaging of the city; many experts suppose, given what was taken and what was left behind, that experienced art thieves were involved, operating under cover of the mob. The precise dimensions of the losses are still not clear.

Before the outbreak of the war, officials at the Iraq Museum moved the smaller objects that were on exhibition to secure storage areas, and it is hoped that those works have survived, although the instability of the current situation has made it impossible to get any clear sense of the state of those holdings. There are reports that efforts to open some secure storage areas, directed by American forces in early May, resulted in further mishandling of antiquities. John Curtis, a curator at the British Museum who recently visited the Iraq Museum, says that some thirty or forty major works are missing, including the Uruk Vase, a late-fourth-millennium vessel with elaborate figural carvings that is a keystone of early Mesopotamian civilization, much as the Bayeux Tapestry is inextricably linked with our understanding of Norman England. (The Uruk Vase is frequently referred to as the Warka Vase, after the modern name of the area where it was discovered.) There were between one hundred thousand and two hundred thousand objects in the storerooms of the museum, and it is still too early to know what is there and what is not. The difficulty of determining the magnitude of the loss is compounded by the total destruction of the administrative offices of the museum, where it seems that every piece of paper, every file card, every computer disk was trashed.

THE HORROR OF THE LOOTING at the Iraq Museum is especially hard to bear because it is now quite clear that it could have been prevented. Months ago, the Pentagon held a meeting at which American experts on the art of Iraq briefed Army officials on the necessity of protecting cultural sites. And we now know that on March 26, two weeks before the fall of Baghdad, the Pentagon office charged with rebuilding Iraq sent a memo to top

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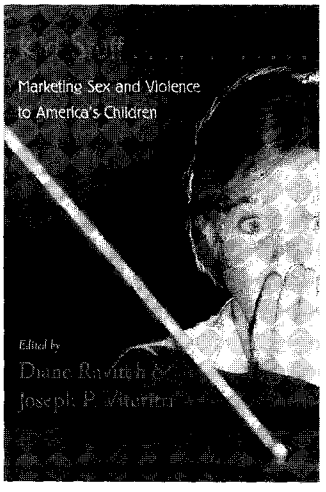

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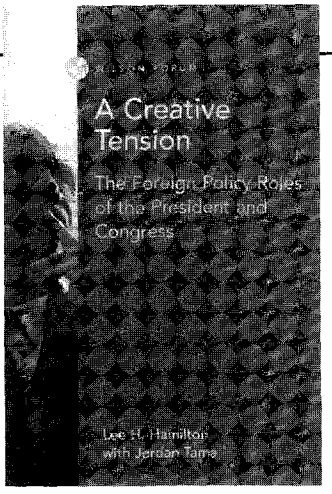

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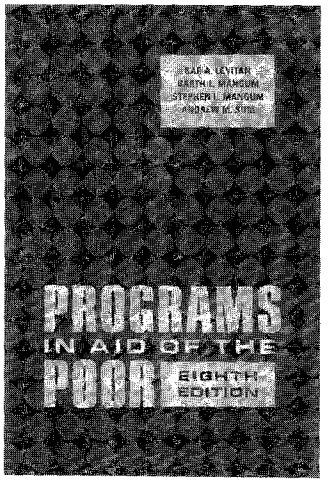

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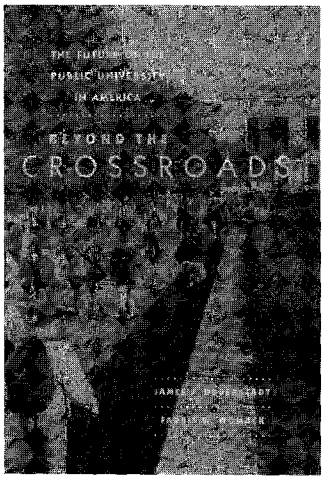

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commanders of American ground forces urging the protection of the museum, which was said to be "a prime target for looters." But no action was taken. On the morning of Thursday, April 10, the day after American troops began to take control of central Baghdad, a dozen or so looters attacked the museum. A few hours later a curator persuaded a few American soldiers to come to the museum, and when their tanks appeared the looters dispersed. But in less than an hour the tanks had left and the looters had returned.

The looting intensified over the next day. On that Friday, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was questioned at a press conference about the looting in Baghdad, and he made it perfectly clear that he had no interest in trying to bring the destruction to a halt. He made a joke about the repeated appearance on television of "the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase." And he seemed to think that he was being witty when he wondered, "Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?" Rumsfeld offered this tough-guy crack in the very hours that the Uruk Vase—a work of art as important as the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* or Grünewald's *Crucifixion*—disappeared. "Freedom's untidy," Rumsfeld explained. "And free people are free to make mistakes and commit crimes and do bad things." Although it is not clear which of Rumsfeld's remarks referred to looting in general and which to the looting of the museum, the looting of the museum was well under way when he made these disgraceful comments. He said that "while no one condones looting," one could "understand the pent-up feelings that may result from decades of repression"—that is, he made the argument that bad experiences justify bad behavior, which is precisely the argument that conservatives are quick to criticize when they hear it coming from the mouths of liberals.

The unseemliness of what Rumsfeld had to say pales beside the hard fact that he was saying these things even as the looting of cultural properties might have been stopped. A few tanks, even a few soldiers, would have made the difference. It was on April 13, three days after the looters first approached the Iraq Museum, that the National Library was attacked, setting off a fire that burned for two days. It seems that most of the contents of the National Library had earlier been removed for safekeeping. But more than six thousand Islamic manuscripts were lost at the Religious Endowment Library. And where was Rumsfeld on April 13? He was chatting with Tim Russert on *Meet the Press,* still unconcerned about the destruction of a cultural patrimony, still explaining that "disorder happens."

You might have thought that somebody at the Pentagon, which we are told is so full of high-thinking Straussians, could have explained to the defense secretary that what he loutishly described as the mayhem that comes with freedom was in fact anarchy. And you might have expected the

COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Standing male figure with clasped hands, ca. 2900–2550 B.C.E.

secretary to evince at least a sliver of comprehension of the achievements that were gathered together in the pillaged museum. So let us begin at the beginning: in the city-states that began to emerge between the Tigris and the Euphrates in the late fourth millennium B.C.E., we find some of the earliest expressions of the urge to understand oneself in relation to the world, and then to give that relationship an artistic form. A good deal of what remains of that civilization was contained within the walls of the Iraq Museum. Among the clay tablets covered with cuneiforms—that earliest of written languages—in the storerooms of the museum were some sections from the Epic of Gilgamesh, which begins with descriptions of the misery of a city under the fist of a tyrannical, larger-than-life leader—and thus announces, perhaps for the first time in history, a human longing for freedom.

It is in this country whose great libraries have been imperiled if not destroyed by the indifference of our government that libraries had their beginnings, in the troves of cuneiform tablets gathered by the kings, collections that embraced not only bureaucratic records but also superb literary texts. And it is in no small measure through the study of early Mesopotamian culture that scholars have been able in the past fifty years to add countless levels of complexity to an older European vision of human experience rooted in the twinned visions of Jerusalem and Athens. We in the West, we Americans, are also the descendants of the first cities of ancient Iraq.

II.

While the Mesopotamian civilizations of the third millennium B.C.E. will always remain mysterious, there is also much that is frankly engaging about this long-gone world. There is a winning quality of intimacy about "Art of the First Cities," despite the epochal reach of the exhibition, which spans something like one thousand years and traces the reverberations of early Mesopotamian civilization in a vast geographical terrain that reaches from India in the east to Uzbekistan in the north and Turkey in the west. While the installation at the Metropolitan is far more theatrical than it needs to be, with walls designed to mimic ancient architecture and a color scheme that is meant to evoke lapis lazuli, carnelian, and gold, the galleries are on a fairly intimate scale, and thus a good match for the objects. By presenting areas devoted to the temple, the palace, and the tomb near the beginning of the show, Joan Aruz, the curator who organized the exhibition, helps museumgoers to find their bearings in an alien world. Later on, when the geographical scope widens, the use of photomurals of various geographic regions helps to telegraph the show's expanding focus, although I find it a tad Disneyish and would not want the museum to make a habit of such techniques. And the organizers have prepared an extraordinary ending for the exhibition, where a

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selection of figures of Gudea, the legendary late-third-millennium king, have a fervor and a power that recapitulates and then exceeds the impact of the worshipper figures at the beginning of the show.

To walk through an exhibition that summarizes a vast and complicated history is to be tempted to bold speculation, and there is nothing wrong with leaping into an alien world in this way, as long as you are later willing to revise your generalizations. This kind of bold thinking is unfortunately lacking in the catalogue of "Art of the First Cities," which reflects an approach all too common in the museum world, whereby a heap of essays by experts in the field are gathered together without any of the effort at synthetic thinking that such an occasion ought to inspire. I find it significant that the huge bibliography does not include H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort's signal achievement, *Arrest and Movement: Space and Time in the Art of the Ancient Near East*, published in 1951 and still in print, and one of the rare attempts to take the emotional temperature of ancient Near Eastern art through a close analysis of form and structure. Groenewegen-Frankfort responds to this art immediately, precipitously. Turning from Egyptian art to Mesopotamian art, she observes that while Egyptian art "suffers from the monotony of an almost uniformly high and a severely restricted type of performance," in Mesopotamia "the best work has a quality of singleness and daring."

I would push the contrast between Egyptian and Mesopotamian art even further. Egyptian art, in which a fanatical naturalism is rationalized through overarching geometric imperatives, announces the classical ideal of a reasoned empiricism that dominates the art of Periclean Athens and of Renaissance Italy. The art of Mesopotamia, with its expressive use of stylizations and its flair for symmetries and patterns, suggests a very different yearning. In the art of the early Mesopotamian cities, we see a reach toward abstraction and anti-naturalistic expressionism that is probably the other essential impulse in the art of the West, an impulse that shapes the achievements of Byzantium, the Romanesque, Bosch, Redon, and Klee.

THE ART OF THESE FIRST CITIES has a remarkable boldness, an impetuousness almost. Among the most striking images near the beginning of the exhibition are those of animals—bulls and also goats in copper alloy or gold or copper-covered wood—that

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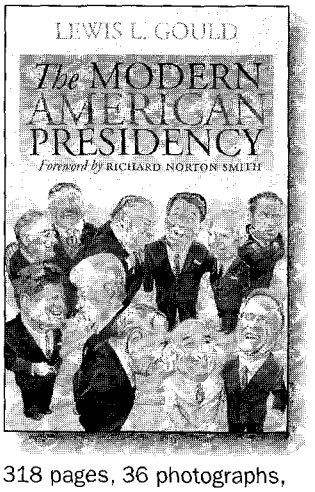

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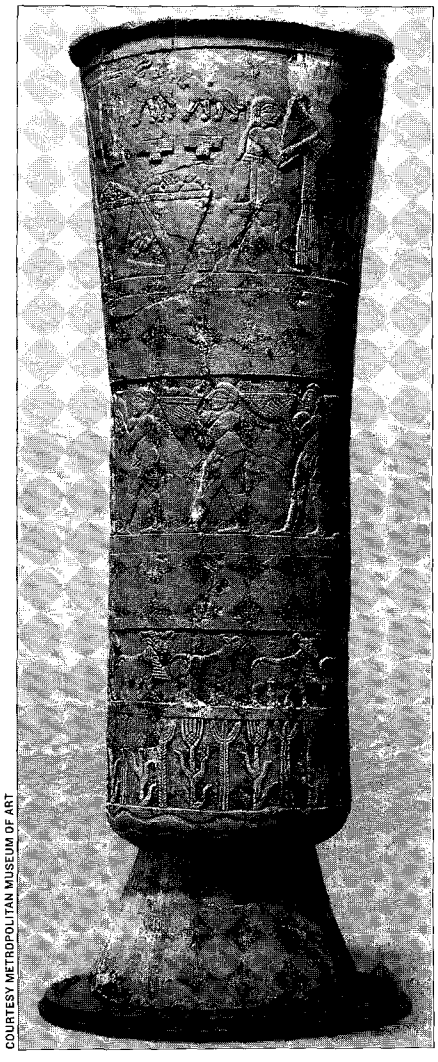
have an arresting, singular presence. The natural force of these creatures—some of them ornamented musical instruments, others formed a temple decoration—seems close to the galvanic immediacy of the animals painted on the walls of prehistoric caves. You feel something primordial, unruly. The excitement comes straight out of the molten heat of the metal that has been shaped into the untrammeled symmetries, the hot formality, of these beings. The presence of bulls on musical instruments seems to be related to their strong voices; and the association of bulls with gods of storms could come out of a similar sense of the animals' unearthly power. But whatever the precise iconography of these images, they certainly feel very different from the animals in Egyptian art, which are always tightly lashed to an overarching human order. If Egyptian art is all reason and probity, a complex grid of accepted behavior and action in which the sting of individuality takes on an almost tragic poignancy, the art of the first cities, despite the insistent repetition of motifs and images, is more concerned with fantasies and singularities, with the incommensurable and the peculiar, with all that is startling and transfiguring.

The showstoppers in "Art of the First Cities" include a headdress with elaborately wrought golden leaves and a famous statue of a rearing goat in which precious metals are mixed with lapis lazuli for a Fabergé effect, but some of the greatest wonders are be to be found in the humbler form of cylinder seals. Entire worlds unwind on a mere inch of carved shell or stone. Often cut into the very hardest of rocks, these minute creations, when pressed into wet clay, produce a continuous ribbon of visual activity, a field on which there unfolds (as Groenewegen-Frankfort puts it) "a remarkable dialectical development" between "the order of pure design and the self-sufficiency of scenes or figures." The artists have a winning authority when it comes to uniting narrative impulse and figural detail within an overarching albeit miniaturized abstraction, with its complicated interweavings of symmetry and asymmetry. And the extraordinary swiftness and assuredness with which the craftsmen cut into the stone, even as it achieves miracles of close naturalistic observation, sets off a rhythmic play of stroke and counterstroke, a whirling syncopated visual movement that is almost jazz-like in its explosive surprise. When these seals were pressed into the clay of the tablets that scribes filled with leaping, angled cuneiform writing, there was a remarkable union of image and text, for the same incision that can make a finger, a hand, an arm, or a draped figure can also make a letter, a number, a record, or a story.

The unfolding of action in long, narrow strips of space is characteristic of many ancient cultures, as is the organization of these horizontal spaces into registers, ranked one above the other. What often



COURTESY METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Uruk Vase, ca. 3300–3000 B.C.E.

struck me at "Art of the First Cities" is how much quirky individuality you feel in the figures and the animals arrayed on those regular registers. On the famous Standard of Ur from the British Museum, a sort of mosaic in shell, lapis lazuli, and red limestone, the rows of soldiers and laborers, although presented in nearly identical poses, are personalized with little variations in their costumes or in the way that they carry a heavy load. There is something ever so slightly motley about their presence, and this can be pleasing. In place of the elegant linearity of Egyptian figure groups, the Sumerian figures have an individual weight. And there are intervals of wild imagination in this art, such as a fragment of an image of a goddess, from the second half of the third millennium, whose hair unfurls around her full, ripe face in the wavelike configurations of stylized braids.

There are times when the ancient Mesopotamian artists seem almost frolicsome. An inlaid panel from a musical instrument, with images of animals playing instruments and a scorpion-man with a body made of tightly wound arcs, suggests the flights of fancy in the margins of medieval illuminated manuscripts. Later in the exhibition, a carving of a priest-king from the Indus Valley, with its suavely shaped slit-eyes and elegant beard and cloak showered with floral motifs, brings to mind the supple fantasies of some of Matisse's late cut-outs.

EVEN THE NORMS THAT ARE established in Mesopotamian art can feel refreshingly eccentric, at least from our perspective. This is especially true in the magnificent final gallery of the exhibition, where a number of statues of the king Gudea, who ruled Ur around 2090 B.C.E., are gathered together. Gudea's gently round head and compact body have none of the bounding muscularity and the chiseled angularity that are so often associated with the grace of leadership. The king seems in some respects a gentle figure, almost unprepossessing, and yet his image, often carved in diorite, a very hard stone, with its slim fingers and toes, takes on a geometric force. These statues—in which Gudea is seated or standing, and in one of which he holds on his lap a plan for a temple—have a kind of modest forcefulness that is almost unique in the long history of representations of heroic leaders.

The Gudea statues are stirring demonstrations of power without pomp, of an authority that comes from within. Writing about the Gudeas in the early pages of *The Metamorphosis of the Gods,* André Malraux observed that "though the figure has no architectural function, every seated Gudea can be described as a ziggurat in human form. The hands with their rigidly vertical and horizontal fingers and the massive base formed by the limbs blazon forth a supernal, inviolable world, other than the world of man; the Architect with a Plan is at once worshipper, gods and temple." Gudea's

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power resides in some mysterious human genius for self-transformation, a power that we feel in his ability to will his frankly modest physiognomy into an authority that is expressed through the imposing architectonic weight of the stone.

X

If Greek art defines, forever, an idea of Heroic Man, early Mesopotamian art defines, forever, an idea of Modest Man. And if that vision finds its perfection in the Gudeas, its origins are some thousand years earlier, in the procession of figures on the Uruk Vase, a tall alabaster carving. Arranged in ascending order on the Uruk Vase are the realms of plants, animals, men, and the goddess Inanna, who stands with her consort Dumuzi before her storerooms, which are loaded with the riches that agriculture had drawn from the Mesopotamian earth. There is a sense of crazy delight in the processionals of the vase, in the regular rhythm of the animals moving to the right and, above them, moving in the opposite direction, the succession of naked men.

Looking at the Uruk Vase, you may feel that you are witnessing a time when artists had not yet rejected the sweaty immediacy of religious experience in favor of the aloof stylizations of ritualistic performance. Each of the men, carrying his offering of food or drink for Inanna, is an individual, with his own compact muscular body, his own touching ordinariness. There is something oddly, subtly comic about this world in which the meetings of men and gods can be so insistently antiheroic. With its eager embrace of life, the Uruk Vase stands at the very beginning of all the notions about individuality within community that are sounded in the linked figures of the Parthenon frieze, of Jean Fouquet's illuminations of processions winding through the cities of France, of Courbet's *Burial at Ornans*, of Seurat's *Circus Sideshow*.

The idea that the arts of very different periods are related, all the way from the ancient Near East through classical Greece and Renaissance Europe down to nineteenth-century Paris, was fairly common one hundred or even fifty years ago—you find such observations in the writings of Henri Focillon and André Malraux. But it has become unusual today. Many people are now afraid that they will seem embarrassingly idealistic if they dare to suggest that there is a largeness to art and a great sweep to art history, or that there is a sanctity about the museums that are dedicated to this extravagant vision. Yet we are obliged, I think, to go ahead and risk this sort of embarrassment. For there is no doubt, in the wake of the terrible events that unfolded in April at the Iraq Museum, that it is precisely this kind of hell-bent idealism about the importance of art, backed by action, that we need right now.

Nothing can forgive Donald Rumsfeld's colossal irresponsibility. There is no question that art historians, archaeologists, and museum professionals did their damnedest to prevent this catastrophe and are now rallying to the aid of the beleaguered staff of the Iraq Museum. But we would also do well to remember that the American officials who dropped the ball on the cultural patrimony of Iraq operate in a capital that in all matters relating to the arts has been tragically scarred by the culture wars of the past twenty years. In the midst of the culture wars, arts professionals, on the right and on the left, had a way of getting so caught up in sectarian goals that they lost touch with what was essential and immediate in art—with the things that had probably excited them in the first place. I

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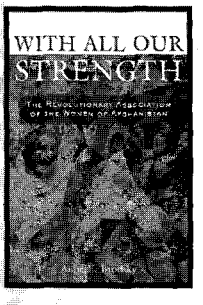

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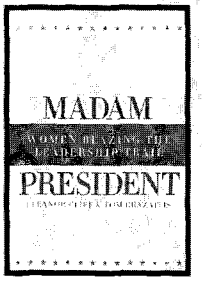

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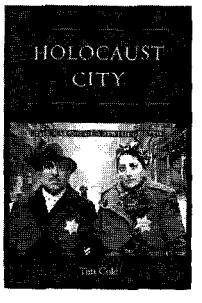

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do not think it is unfair to observe that Rumsfeld's comments on the looting—that it was a laissez-faire occurrence, an excess of freedom—have strange echoes of the let-the-arts-take-care-of-themselves approach that we have been hearing from cultural conservatives as they launched their attacks on the very concept of government involvement in the arts.

And if conservative assaults on government support of the arts are somewhere in the deep background of the events of the past month, the cultural left, which has been quick to tell us that works of art and museums are in fact little more than expressions of power relationships, might also want to take a minute to step back and reflect. For decades now we have been hearing from highly placed academics that the museum is a "colonialist" construction and that the very idea of art is a marketing strategy dreamed up in capitalist Europe. If you take these notions seriously, then you might say that the looters in Baghdad and the American officials who let them go about their work were in fact "progressive" forces, freeing us from the oppressive weight of the museum, the dead hand of the hierarchical past.

I COULD NOT HELP NOTICING THAT the press conference on the Iraq Museum that the Metropolitan Museum of Art presented during a preview of "Art of the First Cities" took place in a gallery lined with paintings by Andy Warhol, an artist whose what-the-hell attitudes, although perhaps amusing in some of his early canvases, have by now played a large role in the ever-growing trivialization of the American museum. Among the Warhols in that gallery at the Metropolitan was a quadruple image of Leonardo's *Mona Lisa.* How, I wonder, can you press the case for the seriousness of the losses in Baghdad in an environment in which Warhol is smirking and saying, "Oh, the real thing doesn't matter, I can just silk-screen up some replicas?" Pop Art attitudes even color some of the protests against the looting at the Iraq Museum. Artists Against the War has organized an "Erase In," urging people to visit the "First Cities" exhibition with pencil and pad, "quietly draw the objects around us, and before leaving the museum ... erase our drawings to symbolically reflect the erasure of Iraqi culture and the silencing of dissent here at home." The idea of erasing a drawing surely recalls Robert Rauschenberg's famous act of erasing a drawing by de Kooning. But how does this sort of nihilism contribute to the ongoing efforts to rebuild a museum? Hasn't enough been erased already?

When you consider the trivialization of the arts—a trivialization that now goes on even at the Metropolitan Museum, one of the few truly serious institutions left in the world today—you can understand why neoconservatives complain about government involvement in such travesties, just as you can see why some academics like to point out that the museum is just a marketing tool. These attitudes are not purely cynical; they may grow out of a sense of how imperfect a thing the museum is. It is true that museums have more and more concerned themselves with their roles as tourist bait, as entertainment centers, as venues for the social whirl. But what has happened in Baghdad should remind us of what museums really are, and of the role that they play in the most essential expressions of human experience. For those on the cultural left and the cultural right who have sometimes cared more about polemics than about art, the catastrophe in Baghdad ought to serve as a summons to intellectual responsibility comparable to the summons to moral responsibility that the massacres in Bosnia and Kosovo turned out to be for some post-Vietnam isolationists.

When you walk through "Art of the First Cities," you are keenly aware both of how artificial museums are and of how essential they are. An exhibition such as this one, with its elaborate settings and lighting effects and its canny splicings and dicings of chronology and geography, is meant to finesse the messiness of the past and to present us with a fully believable historical illusion. And yet even though we are aware that what we are experiencing is quite literally a show, we also know that some indispensable truth is being revealed, in the thrilling miniaturized worlds of the cylinder seals and in the gigantic, beckoning eyes of those votive figures. You cannot miss the fact that the hunger for feeling was alive five thousand years ago—a point that Irene J. Winter, a scholar at Harvard, has underscored in recent years when she has argued that the appearance in Sumerian and Akkadian texts of words such as "well-ornamented," "good form," "grace," "vitality," and "luminosity" suggests that we are seeing, millennia before Kant, the sense of beauty, of sensuous form as essential human experience. What happened in the great galleries of Baghdad is a grim reminder that the sense of beauty, which is as old as culture itself, is terribly fragile and also extraordinarily durable. If we lose those strange, humble praying figures that were carved in Sumer so long ago, we will have lost a part of ourselves. ■

Hillel Halkin
The Prelude

THE ENEMY AT HIS PLEASURE: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE JEWISH PALE OF SETTLEMENT DURING WORLD WAR I
By S. Ansky
Edited and translated by Joachim Neugroschel
(Metropolitan Books, 327 pp., $30)

I WAS A COLLEGE STUDENT WHEN I first read, in Hebrew, S.Y. Agnon's novel *A Guest for the Night,* which tells the story of a Jew from Palestine who returns after the war to his native town in Galicia, the area of southeastern Poland that was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1917. There he finds the remains of a devastated Jewish community. Many of its members have been killed or maimed; the survivors are traumatized and broken. The markets are deserted, and the synagogues that have not been destroyed have been looted and are empty of worshippers. All lies in ruins in a bleak, post-Holocaust world.

Or so I took it to be. It was years later that I discovered that *A Guest for the Night* was published in September 1939, the month of the Nazi invasion of Poland. The devastation that it describes has nothing to do with the Holocaust. Its war is World War I, the effects of which on Jewish life in Galicia were still in evidence in 1930, when Agnon re-visited the town in which he grew up for the first time since he left

Hillel Halkin is the author, most recently, of ACROSS THE SABBATH RIVER: IN SEARCH OF A LOST TRIBE OF ISRAEL *(Houghton Mifflin).*

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it in 1908. The fate of Galician Jewry in World War I was something about which I had known nothing.

It is noteworthy that, when it comes to the history of anti-Semitic savagery in Europe, Jewish collective memory tends to jump from the pogroms of 1882–1905 in czarist Russia straight to the Holocaust. Yet as frightful as they were, those pogroms, in which probably less than a thousand Jews were killed, were a trifle in comparison with the murder by czarist troops of tens of thousands of Jews in Galicia during World War I and the deportation from their homes of an additional half-million people, 50 percent of the region's Jewish population. Why has this horror been all but forgotten, as has also been the massacre of another fifty thousand to one hundred thousand Jews by anti-Bolshevik forces in Ukraine during the civil war in Russia between 1917 and 1921?

Perhaps it is a matter of timing. The pre–World War I pogroms took place during a peaceful age, after two centuries in which European anti-Semitism had not erupted violently; and so the shock and the public attention they aroused were great. The killings in Galicia, on the other hand, transpired in wartime, when the world was preoccupied with even worse carnage. Journalistic access to the affected areas was all but impossible, and there was in any case a reluctance to publish anti-Russian reports in countries allied with Russia against Germany.

Afterward, too, it proved difficult to focus on these events. In the case of Galicia, the worst Russian atrocities were committed early in the war, by the end of which they had been pushed to the background by the fall of the czarist regime and the emergence of an independent Poland. In Ukraine, the victorious Bolsheviks, loath to be identified as saviors of the Jews or to advertise the depths of popular Ukrainian anti-Semitism, did not make much of the massacres either. Apart from what appeared in Yiddish, relatively little was written on either subject in the interwar period, and after World War II the blinding glare of the Holocaust obscured all else.

WE ARE FORTUNATE, THEREfore, to be given, in an excellent translation by Joachim Neugroschel (despite its oddly rendered title), large sections of S. Ansky's four-volume *Khurbn Galitsye*, or *The Destruction of Galicia*—an eyewitness report, published posthumously in Yiddish in 1922, of the Jewish experience in the region during the war. This would be an important document even if it were not such a well-written one, being the only book-length testimony of its kind. (The Hebrew writer Avigdor Hameiri, who fought on the Galician front in World War I as an officer in the Austrian army, published a volume of stories about what he saw and heard there, but those are brief, semi-fictionalized accounts.) The fact that its author was a prominent Yiddish writer makes this book still more of an event.

S. Ansky was the pen name of Shloyme Zanvel Rappaport (1863–1920), a Yiddish writer who is best known today as the playwright of *The Dybbuk,* a drama that has become emblematic of the Yiddish and Hebrew theater. Mainly, however, he wrote fiction and essays, including the novel *Piyonern,* or *Pioneers,* subtitled "A Chronicle of the '70s," an autobiographically based account of a Russian Jewish adolescent's drift into dissident circles after breaking with the traditional religious world he was raised in. But unlike most of the small number of young Jews who followed such a trajectory in those years while remaining within a Jewish orbit (their ranks were to swell in the 1880s and 1890s), Ansky turned his back on Jewish life entirely.

He joined the Russian revolutionary movement and for a while led the proletarian life of a *narodnik,* "going to the people" as a miner in Ukraine. Then he moved to St. Petersburg to work for the socialist publication *Rosskoye Bogatsvo,* and in 1894 fled the czarist police for western Europe, where he lived, much of the time in Paris, until 1905. It was only after his return to Russia, following the temporarily successful revolution of that year, that he gradually re-entered the Jewish community and turned to writing in Yiddish and to the investigation of Jewish folklore, an interest that culminated in a prolonged ethnographic expedition under his direction to Ukraine in 1912–1914.

Ansky was exceptional among the Yiddish writers of his generation in his internalization of a Russian identity alongside his Jewish one. Contemporaries such as Sholem Aleichem, although they were thoroughly at home in Russian life and culture, never really thought of themselves as Russians. But Ansky did, and the split between his two sides was both painful and productive in a way that anticipated the experience of large numbers of twentieth-century Jews. *The Dybbuk,* which was subtitled "Between Two Worlds," was not only a play about the return of a dead man's soul to a former life and the woman he had loved. It

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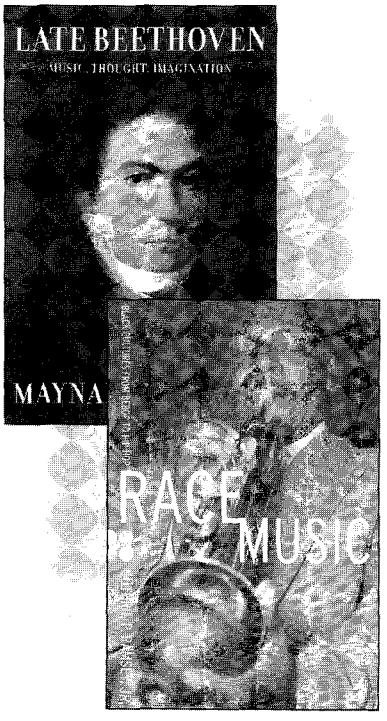

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was also, for Ansky, a personal allegory of coming back to Jewishness.

When, therefore, soon after the outbreak of World War I, stories began seeping back to Russia about atrocities committed by Russian troops, especially by Cossack units, against the Jews of Galicia, into which the czarist army had swept in its first offensive, Ansky was a natural choice to head a relief committee. He had the necessary sophistication, commitment, and courage; a thorough familiarity with small-town Jewish communities; proven organizational abilities in the field; and good contacts in Russian political circles. Above all, he had the ability to deal with Russian officers and bureaucrats as a compatriot, and also to be treated by them as one, arguing and making demands and refusing to take no for an answer in a manner that would have struck such men, some of them anti-Semites and all of them harried by pressing wartime responsibilities, as insupportable Jewish insolence in almost anyone else.

At first, in fact, as Ansky describes it in *The Destruction of Galicia,* the obstacles to his mission came more from Jews than from Russians. The wealthy—that is, Russianized—Jews whom he asked to contribute to a relief effort did not want to give to a specifically Jewish cause. "Hoping," as he puts it in Volume I, "to make up for their inaction by donating large sums to the overall war effort, they argued that the Jews 'mustn't set themselves apart' from the rest of society." And he relates:

> A high-level Russian official, returning from Galicia, asked one millionaire, a renowned leader in the Kiev Jewish community: "Why don't you organize some kind of relief for your Galician brothers, who are starving to death?" The millionaire replied: "Your Excellency, we do not regard the Galician Jews as our brothers; we see them as enemies, with whom we're at war."

Given that the average Galician Jew, though his Yiddish might sound funny to a Russian Jew, was about as different from the latter as Jews in Los Angeles are from Jews in New York, this was a craven response. Most likely, the anonymous "millionaire" was the Kiev sugar magnate Lev Brodsky, who was in a position to wield a lot more influence than Ansky. Yet nobody familiar with the behavior during World War II of American Jewish leaders, many of whom were similarly hesitant to request "special favors" for their co-religionists in Europe, can be terribly shocked by this.

Nor was Ansky. One of the most impressive things about this impressive man, at least as he emerges from the pages of *The Destruction of Galicia,* is his unflappability in the face of frustration, danger, and human obtuseness, and his willingness to keep on trying. During his two years of crisscrossing wartime Galicia, from early 1915 to early 1917, when the Russian army collapsed after a long back-and-forth campaign against the Germans and the Austrians, he was a one-man humanitarian aid organization. Although he often had assistance, both from Galician Jews and from the Russian military, it was generally of a local and temporary nature. Since Ansky did not travel with a team, each time he came to a new town or province he had to look for fresh people to work with.

The one thing that he generally had enough of, once the initial resistance of donors like Brodsky was overcome, was money. The problem was finding something useful to do with it in places where commerce had broken down and Jewish communal leadership had evaporated. Ansky's usual procedure upon arriving in a place was to begin by gathering information—how many Jews were in the vicinity; how many had been killed; how many were ill, starving, or homeless because their houses had been destroyed or they had been evicted from elsewhere. (The Russian army, fearing that the Jews, the most pro-Austrian of Galicia's ethnic minorities, would collaborate with the enemy, systematically cleared them from frontline areas.) Then he would search for trustworthy individuals to dispense some of the cash that he carried about with him—at one point, in a "forty-pound carton" containing thirty thousand rubles in small change—and move on.

It was all improvised and haphazard, from start to finish, and a drop in the bucket of the Galician Jews' woes. During the last, panicky Russian retreat, Ansky hitched a ride with a staff surgeon heading for Lvov. They drove all night, and in the morning we arrived in the shtetl of Mosti-Velki. Since we were running low on gasoline, we stopped to get some. I went to look up [some] Jews. . . . They told me that when the Russians had marched in some nine or ten months ago, they had launched a horrible pogrom. However, the town had remained whole, it hadn't burned down; and aside from some scattered looting, there had been no further pogroms. Two days ago the army had started pulling out and now the Jews were terrified that the Cossacks would come and destroy the shtetl. . . .

> The economic situation of the Jews had been wretched all this time. They were starving to death. . . . I gave them six hundred rubles and tried to calm their fears a little. This unexpected help out of the blue as well as my warm behavior moved these poor, terrified, defenseless people so deeply that they burst out crying. It was terrible to see five elderly Jews, two of them quite old, loudly sobbing and weeping like children, hastily wiping away the tears that rolled down their mustaches and beards.

Back in Kiev, Lvov having meanwhile fallen to the Austrians too, Ansky reflects:

> During my prewar ethnographic research, I had noticed that so many folk songs and folk tales are full of grief and lament. "So they began to weep and wail," "Woe and sorrow," and so on. And Russian folk songs likewise say that "he shed a torrent of tears," "bathed in tears." I had always seen this as mere grandiloquence. But in Galicia I realized that it is true to life. I saw people "shedding torrents of tears." There are moments when tears come streaming on their own, almost unnoticed, as surrogates for words. They flow as easily as words; they keep pouring when words have lost all strength and there is no one to talk to.

Although by the time he undertook his mission Ansky's Jewish identity meant more to him than his Russian identity, he never lost the latter and even served as a delegate to the Duma under the Kerensky government after the fall of the czar. Still, Ansky's chronicle, in which he regards the fighting with a dispassionately impartial eye, contains no patriotism in the sense of

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identification with the Russian war effort. In one exchange that he describes with the Russian general Igor Platonovitsh Demidov, who had spoken to him of the moral "renewal" brought about by the war, he reports himself as replying: "Igor Platonovitsh, I've been in the thick of the war for three months now, and I've seen a lot of soldiers. I've seen men who have looked death in the face, soldiers who have been killed and been wounded. But I haven't seen anyone who has been renewed."

If there is Russian patriotism of any kind in *The Destruction of Galicia*, it is in the way that Ansky, the ex-*narodnik*, sympathetically understands the curious fact that many Galician Jews whom he encountered, although "tormented and ruined by the Russian army, nevertheless enthuse about the Russian character. They always have a story about a [Russian] soldier or an officer who displayed a poignant idealism and humanity." "The Russian troops are better than the Austrians," a Jewish tavern owner tells him. "[They] understand that a Jew has to live on something, and they give him a chance to earn a kopeck." And a young Galician Jew describes to him a scene he witnessed:

> It was raining. The street was covered with deep, swampy mud. A [Russian] military transport rolled by. The soldiers were sitting in their wagons, soaked and exhausted. An old Jewish woman was trudging along, muddy and ragged. One of the soldiers noticed her, stopped his wagon, and offered her a ride. Our Austrian soldiers would never do a thing like that.

The Russians, as Ansky saw them, were wildly inconsistent in their behavior. At one point, he tells of matching atrocities. On the Russian side, "in a shtetl near Wolkowisk, the soldiers drove the Jews into the marketplace and ordered them to strip naked. The men and the women were ordered to dance with one another and then ride on pigs. Finally, one-tenth of the naked Jews were shot and killed." On the German side, "in Blonye, a shtetl near Warsaw, when the Germans marched in, they came upon a farm several miles from town, a barrack with 192 [Jewish] cholera patients.... [They] were scared the disease might spread, so they put straw around the barrack and ignited it. All 192 patients burned to death." And he remarks:

> I don't know what's worse: torching a barrack filled with sick people or making people strip naked, ride on pigs, and gunning them down. The barrack fire, no matter how inhumane, at least had a specific goal. With the Germans, you knew who you were dealing with. You knew that when it came to a necessary objective, they wouldn't stop at the worst cruelty. By the same token, you could be certain if you didn't get in their way, they wouldn't lay a finger on you. But with Russians, you were never sure of your life, of your dignity. The Russians were never guided by sound logic or practical considerations.

The contradictory and sometimes childish extremes of the Russian soul are a theme of many Russian writers. But it is in regard to the Germans that Ansky's judgment sends a chill down your spine. "You could be certain if you didn't get in their way, they wouldn't lay a finger on you." Indeed so; which is why, as Joachim Neugroschel points out in his introduction, many Polish Jews were sanguine, despite Hitler's anti-Semitic ravings and policies, about the German invasion in

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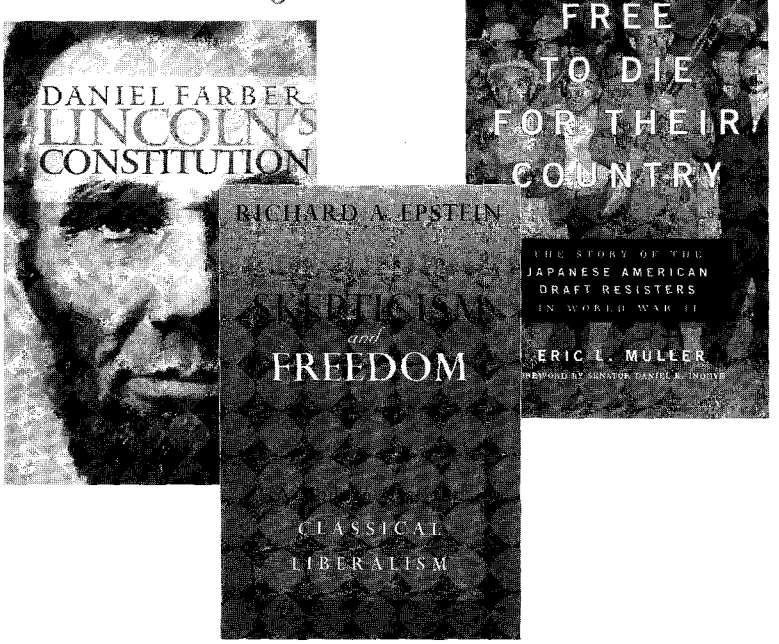

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1939 and did not take the opportunity to flee to the Russian zone of Poland while they could. They had lived through a German military occupation before and knew the Germans were reasonable. True, "when it came to a necessary objective, they wouldn't stop at the worst cruelty"; but who, having lived through a war in which there was no "sound logic" to killing even a few tens of thousands of Jews, could have imagined a war in which the murder of six million would be deemed necessary? ■

Glyn Maxwell
Knight Moves

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT: A NEW VERSE TRANSLATION
by W. S. Merwin
(Alfred A. Knopf, 208 pp., $22)

AT A PARTY TO CELEBRATE the tenth anniversary of Bloodaxe Books, the small Newcastle publisher that launched the career of several young British poets in the late 1980s, the editor made a speech in which, to general applause, he characterized the publishing house as being the alternative—indeed, the opposition—to the English literary "establishment," meaning essentially London and the South-East, Oxford and Cambridge, Faber & Faber and the white middle classes. As a pale Oxford graduate from leafy Hertfordshire who, like most of the poets there, had been accepted by Bloodaxe only after trying and failing at the gilded doorknob of the villainous Mr. Faber, I looked around nervously and clapped louder than anyone. For a deep and very English crevasse had opened up in the room. It seemed sensible to step across it and start mingling.

When the poet laureate John Betjeman died in 1984—in my country one has to die to be relieved of the burden of writing politely about the Windsors—there were only two serious English candidates for the succession, only two figures whose work struck a sufficient number as first rate, world class, important: a gloomy suburban poet from the southern midlands and a gloomy rural poet from the Yorkshire hills. Again a deep fissure snaked across the land, setting on one side Philip Larkin, the rhymer and jazz fan cycling to his job in the public library, and on the other side Ted Hughes, the free-versifying backwoodsman fishing alone in what was left of the wilds. The town and the country; the book and the voice; the raised brows and the hooded eyes. That several facts (Larkin's stubborn provincialism, Hughes's long association with Faber) blur the division hardly matters, for the images remain in the national consciousness, and they stem largely from the work itself.

One doesn't have to confine oneself to poetry to find these oppositions at rough play in English life. The "soft" southerner and the "hard" northerner are stock characters propped up by the flat-vowelled exaggeration of the northern accent (no one in the south thinks that he speaks with an accent) or the effete ornamentation of ivory-tower discourse. Of the countless bisections striating the old country, this is one of the deepest, echoing not only age-old tribal enmity but also linguistic intrusion, economic resentment, and folk mythology. Comedy runs with it; soccer violence is fueled by it; popular music exploits it. For several months in the late 1990s British tabloid culture—which is, these days, British culture—thrilled to the "battle" between the rock bands Oasis (Manchester) and Blur (Colchester), which proceeded wholly along the lines of the north-south divide. General elections, at least until the advent of the centrist Blair, often conformed to it exactly, with the industrial heartlands glowing red for Labour, the genteel south sporting a uniform Tory blue, and a dependable cast of no-nonsense Lancastrian trade-unionists and plummy aristocrats from the Home Counties bearing out each other's prejudices. There endures in English culture an instinctive association of northernness with grit, dearth, provincialism, and tradition, and of southernness with slickness, privilege, control, and newfangledness.

Of course, peering into this fissure one can sometimes make out older, deeper cracks. At the moment of the island's greatest peril, the more ancient strain—the tongue of the realm before it was last successfully conquered in 1066—could be heard bubbling to the surface of the language:

> We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

Only two of the words in this passage are "newcomers" of Old French or Latinate origin, including of course "surrender." It might be protested that the Normans were hardly the enemy this time, but language fights its own battles of Britain.

IN THE LAUREATE RACE IN 1984, as it happened, Larkin declined the post, and the torch passed from the rhyming suburbanite Betjeman across the deep divide to Hughes. The appointment of Andrew Motion in 1999, on Hughes's death, took it once more into the southern regions, in this instance London, to which the four-letter indignation of certain northern bards ringingly attested. But if there had been a poet laureateship available six hundred years earlier, and had the two poets concerned been aware of each other's existence, a similar sort of standoff might have been observed. For the late fourteenth century also produced (with apologies to any masters whose work simply vanished) two major English poets. Again, one was a figure immersed in public life, writing in rhyme with an ear to the contemporary murmur, tending to Latinate form and diction, while the other was a man from the backwaters, removed from the center of power, with his feet planted firmly in the Anglo-Saxon world and his ear to the rhythms of a former time, echoing lost cultures and vanishing mythologies. The former poet is Chaucer; the latter is the nameless genius who wrote *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*

Whoever he was, he did not call it that. We do not know what he called it. We call him the Gawain Poet. He probably wrote three other poems—*Patience, Purity,* and *Pearl*—the last of which may be about a dead girl who may have been his daughter. He possibly wrote a fifth poem called *St. Erkenwald,* and he was possibly a monk. All that is thought about him with any certainty is that he came from the North-West Midlands, which is to say Cheshire or Staffordshire, close to Wales. This area connects him to the Alliterative Revival, a group of poems that use alliteration as their defining form, with rhyme either subordi-

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nate or non-existent. These poems resemble classic Old English gore-fests such as *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* purely in terms of alliterative impact, but in their metrical sophistication, their awareness of romance tradition, and their moral concern they form a distinct Middle English literature, of which *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is the jewel.

The poem, along with *Patience, Purity,* and *Pearl,* survived in only one manuscript, known as Cotton Nero. It had belonged to a Henry Savile of Yorkshire in the early seventeenth century, and it turned up in the British Museum in the mid-nineteenth century. The fragility of this thread is in itself suggestive. Whereas the works of Chaucer and Gower (the literary "establishment" of the late 1300s) were preserved in numerous volumes bound elegantly for the aristocracy, the works of the Alliterative Revival are more humble artifacts, made in commercial scriptoria for the clergy and the gentry. The illustrations to *Gawain* in Cotton Nero are poor, and often they misrepresent the text. The poem is dated vaguely, anywhere between 1350 and 1400, unlike, say, Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* (1380) or Gower's *Confessio amantis* (1390).

The European diplomat Chaucer probably knew nothing of the provincial Gawain Poet, though he was certainly aware of the Alliterative Revival. The words of his Canterbury-bound Parson—"I am a southren man,/I kan nat geeste [tell] *rum ram ruf* by lettre"—make explicit the connection between alliterative verse and the geography of medieval England. To the modernizing Chaucer, who brought home from the Continent a line—the rhyming pentameter—that would reign supreme in English poetry until the twentieth century, alliterative measures would have sounded archaic and hidebound, a dialect associated with the bygone conventions of courtly love, or, further back, the rough clangor of the mead hall. Indeed, his description of a tournament in the fourth part of *The Knight's Tale* is a pastiche of the style: "He thurgh the thikkeste of the throng gan threste;/Ther stomblen steedes stronge. . . ." The current that powers *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is really not felt again until the nineteenth century, in the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins ("As kingfishers catch fire, dragonflies draw flame"), the peculiar brilliance of which was a buried stream in his lifetime, deep below the wide river of the English pentameter as it flowed on through Wordsworth to Tennyson, laureate by laureate, toward its eventual dethronement in the coffee bars of Paris and the mud of the Somme.

The Gawain Poet may have lived in a backwater, but he was no primitive. *Sir Gawain* is as sophisticated a work as any deriving from the Arthurian tradition, and it makes the prose efforts of Malory in *Morte Darthur* a century later—the chief source of what we know about Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, and the rest—seem doggedly amateurish. *Gawain* is both morally coherent and psychologically acute. It is at ease with French vocabulary, which is deployed for its courtly and aristocratic flavor, along with the commoner stamp of local dialect and the sharp, warlike words the Vikings clattered into English. It is structurally splendid, brutal, funny, and erotic.

What happens? To make a long story short, the Christmas revels of Camelot are disturbed by the appearance of a huge knight, green-skinned and dressed in green, who challenges any one of the Knights of the Round Table to behead him. Young Gawain, eager to impress, volunteers. The Green Knight, duly beheaded, puts his grinning head back on and tells Gawain to meet him in a year to receive the return stroke. The year passes and winter comes again. Gawain sets off despondently and arrives at a strange castle in a wood, where he is warmly welcomed by the host, Sir Bercilak, for three nights of raucous reveling, and even more warmly by Bercilak's wife, who spends three days—while her husband is out hunting—trying to get Gawain into bed, or rather, since he spends all day in bed anyway, trying to get in it with him. He stoutly resists temptation and she retreats in disappointment.

Bercilak and Gawain have made a deal that whatever each one gains during the day, it should be given to the other at night. So Gawain gets a mixed grill of deer, boar, and fox; Bercilak gets the three chaste kisses given by his Lady to Gawain. What he does not get—since Gawain does not tell him about it—is the enchanted green sash that Gawain reluctantly accepts from the Lady on the third day, and which he takes only because he thinks it might save him from the death blow. When at last he finds the Green Knight at the Green Chapel, he endures two feints—while nervously awaiting decapitation—and then the slightest axe cut on the nape of the neck. The Green Knight turns out to be Bercilak in disguise, who (at the behest of the inevitable Morgan le Fay, tireless witch-foe of Camelot) was using his wife to test Gawain's chastity. Gawain's slight wound is payback for his covert acceptance of the green sash. He returns to Camelot, relieved if abashed, because he failed to be as good a knight as he should have been. King Arthur and the gang laugh and sympathize, and decide they will all wear green sashes in honor of Gawain's adventure.

THAT *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT* sits at the twilight of the alliterative tradition and the dawn of the rhyming one is signalled in the unmistakable form of its stanzas, which follow a group of fifteen to twenty-five long alliterating lines (the "stock") with one single-stress line (the "bob") and four short rhyming lines (the "wheel"). The bob and wheel always rhyme ABABA—for example:

Both his wombe and his wast were
worthily smale,
And alle his fetures folyande, in forme
that he hade,
ful clene;
For wonder of his hwe men hade,
Set in his semblaunt sene;
He ferde as freke were fade,
And overal enker-grene.

The Identity of the Bridegroom

One night you will walk into a flume
Of the great Mississippi River with your blue

Malthusian urge, in a gluey
Greatcoat of a great

Inertia, and go down into the runneled
Underworld, standing still as a pale suitor

Handing blossoms to a girl with queen

Yellow jackets in her hair I swear
You will. I am tired

Of women who are sad. I am tired
Of men who are tired.

You are unwholesome mantling
The river in this
Ochre-wedded light.

LUCIE BROCK-BROIDO

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Or in W. S. Merwin's new translation:

And both his belt and belly were trim
and small,
And all of his features were in
proportion
to the rest of him.
But more than anything
His color amazed them:
A bold knight riding,
The whole of him bright green.

Swerving from unrhymed alliteration to short strong rhymes is as powerful a formal switch as ending a Spenserian sonnet with free verse, or suddenly breaking from prose into poetry, or inexplicably lurching into a medley of foreign languages. Indeed, to contemporary ears perhaps *The Waste Land* furnishes the most memorable examples in English poetry of abrupt formal derailment, which Eliot almost always uses to clash histories or atmospheres violently together. London once; London now. Faith; doubt. Beauty; sleaze.

Without this strategic foundation for such a formal shift, the effect is likely to seem—as so often in contemporary verse—a groundless whim. But the sudden terseness and pattern of the bob-and-wheel tolls through *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* like an ominous change in time, a perspective of wider fate. It ends every stanza, but the stanzas differ in length, and so it never comes at quite the same point: it is tremblingly expected. When it comes it freezes the action, or winds it on, or lets the poet glance out at the reader; and sometimes it cliffhangs. Even when it merely runs with the tale being told in the stock, the sharpness of the shift is unnerving and suggestive.

That Merwin's translation, which is generally clear, deft, and engaging and has many passages of beauty, so often avoids the full rhyme of the bob-and-wheel is surprising, especially given the formal alertness of his own poetry. Both his last collection, *The River Sound* (1999), and his Hawaiian epic, *The Folding Cliffs* (1998), dispense with punctuation entirely and effectively, which is impossible without the high level of craftsmanship that he displays. In introducing his translation, Merwin explains that he did not wish "to cramp and twist the lines in an effort to make an exact replica of the verse form in what has become, in six hundred years, another language." His sensitivity to the accurate thrust of the lines is admirable, but I would argue that many elements of that language are the same now as they were then, particularly the difference between rhyming and not rhyming, and that lesser poets than

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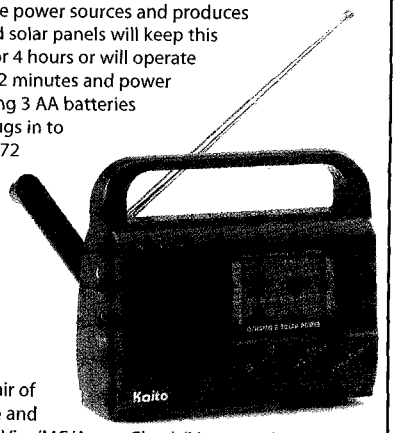

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Merwin have brought off the rhyme without significant disrespect to the meaning or discomfort to the reader. The half-rhymes or slant rhymes that Merwin tends to employ in the bob-and-wheel only serve to hint at what a striking effect would be possible with the knell of a full rhyme. When the bob-and-wheel is given no rhyme at all, it feels awkward and vaguely unnecessary.

DOMINANT FORMS DO NOT SURvive for nothing. At the prow of the twenty-first century we are in a fortunate position: we may appreciate new rhyming work of excellence while hearing in lesser endeavors the sterility and the fatigue of the thing. Now that it is no longer a given form, a background music, rhyming has to derive from our own form, our breath and blood, fully to express us. Alliteration too, long ago, was a background music: it was what poets did. (Just as rapid feminine rhyming—feminine in the prosodic sense, I hasten to add—is what rappers do.) By the time of *Gawain,* with the rhymed pentameter beginning to take root in English verse, an alliterative poet would have to know what he was doing, or why he was doing what it was doing.

What *is* it doing? Much the same work as rhyme does. It is marking resemblances. It does not dwell on them, it merely holds them together for a fleeting instant, implying an inevitable or even mystical momentum in the world, or the world as it translates to us through language. Both rhyme and alliteration are mnemonic (unlike prose or free verse), and the ability to recall what things go well with other things is, presumably, the survival skill *sine qua non.* Whether primitive thought processes or happy coincidences have connected certain words by first letter or by vowel sound is beside the point: connecting them connects them. It gives the world, for the moment of a line or a breath, direction:

> Bot thenne the wether of the worlde
> wyth wynter hit threpez,
> Colde clengez adoun, cloudez
> uplyften,
> Schyre schedez the rayn in schowrez
> ful warme,
> Fallez upon fayre flat, flowrez there
> schewen,
> Bothe groundez and the grevez grene
> ar her wedez. . . .

And Merwin:

> But then the weather of the world
> makes war on winter,
> Cold cringes downward, clouds lift,
> The shining rain comes down in warm
> showers,
> Falls on the fair meadow, flowers
> appear there,
> Both the open land and the groves are
> in green garments. . . .

Merwin here, and throughout the poem, pushes the alliteration just enough to drive the poem on—as well as respecting the sheer delight the poet takes in it—without resorting to a parody of Old English habits. He also preserves in the poem a most singular stylistic feature, which at first strikes one as an archaic peculiarity, but is in fact a resource the Gawain Poet uses to fascinating effect. Virtually every stanza of the poem switches at least once, sometimes three or four times, from the past tense to the present and back. This device—from which writers are consistently discouraged—gives the poem moments of startling clarity and fresh perspective.

The places where the poem shifts into the present tense are frequently moments of physical action, particularly those involving Gawain himself. Here, in Merwin's words, is the young knight seeing Bercilak's castle for the first time:

> The knight gazed at the side of the
> castle nearest to him,
> Shimmering and shining through the
> gleaming oaks.
> Then he takes off his helmet and
> devoutly thanks
> Jesus and St. Julian, both of whom are
> kind,
> Who had heard his cry and answered
> him with kindness.
> "Now I beg you," the knight said,
> "to grant me good lodging."

The past tense covers what is there to be seen, depicting Gawain as if in tableau against the background of the castle; and the present tense is all about what he decides to do—and, touchingly, makes Jesus and St. Julian, "both of whom are kind," feel *present* in Gawain's life—before returning the knight to the business in hand, framed within the more conventional past-tense narration. When Gawain first meets a pair of ladies at the castle—one of whom, Bercilak's wife, is crucial to the story—the present tense seems to lean out of the framework of ritual politesse, involving us in the delicacy of the actual situation: "The lovelier one he embraced lightly,/Kissed her politely, and addressed her in courtly fashion./They ask to be acquainted and at once he requests/To be their true servant, if that would please them./They took him between them and led him, while they talked,/To a chamber. . . ."

Gawain's first fraught encounter with the Lady, when she ventures into his bedroom, is equally suggestive:

> And as he slumbered softly it seemed
> to him he heard
> A small sound at his door, and
> suddenly it opened
> And he heaves up his head out of the
> bedclothes,
> He lifts up a corner of the curtain a
> little
> And peers out cautiously to see what
> it might be.
> It was the Lady, the loveliest one to
> look at.

The past handles those things that happen regardless of our hero: he sleeps, he hears a sound, a door opens. The present animates him, draws physical responses. The past returns, out of his control, for he can do nothing but behold the Lady's ominous beauty. After her last departure from his room, and his closest shave with temptation, the tense splits in a single line: "When ho watz gon, Sir Gawayn gerez hym sone" ("When she was gone, Gawain puts on his garments"), which suggests both his momentary paralysis at her leaving and his urgency thereafter.

THE POEM'S FINAL STANZA BEgins with Gawain's mournful apology for having failed the good name of Camelot, a speech that in its high-flown self-pity makes one want to burst out laughing. Which is precisely what the knights do, though not before King Arthur, in a tender moment, has consoled the forlorn Gawain. Again the little human touch is placed in the present, before the figures recede into the familiar tapestry of life at the Round Table:

> ["]This is the token of the untruth
> I was taken in
> And I must wear it as long as I live,
> For no one can hide the wrong he
> does, nor be free of it,
> For if ever it takes hold, nothing can
> cut it away."
> The king comforts the knight, and all
> the court also,
> And they laughed loudly about it. . . .

One might have noticed by this time that these affable *bon viveurs* are not the

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high-minded chivalric paragons of traditional Arthurian romance. Indeed, one of the great charms of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* and an explanation for the delight it continues to give us now, is its earthbound understanding, its compassion for the fleshly frame set against the impossible ideals of the past.

This is seen not so much in Gawain's fault (his cowardice) but in the indulgence and the forgiveness extended to him by both Bercilak—who actually invites him "to come visit [his] aunt," formerly known as the terrifying Morgan le Fay—and by the chuckling Knights of the Round Table. Gawain was scared and wore the sash because he thought it might save his skin: the poem treats this frailty with the sympathy that, well, we would. Gawain does not fail spectacularly; in fact he does a little better than expected, especially over three days alone in bed with a lady "more beautiful . . . than Guinevere," but he is no Sir Galahad, the fearless (and otherwise featureless) paragon of *Morte Darthur.*

OF COURSE, ANY FOURTEENTH-century reader of *Gawain* would have known countless other stories from the canon, including many more works than the few that made it into our hands, but each one played variations on a generally agreed history: that Arthur was destined to rule England, that he married Guinevere, that the Round Table was great, that it declined, that its enemy was Morgan le Fay, that Arthur was undone by treachery and died in battle. Within these borders, infinite stories were possible. Sir Gawain had traditionally been depicted as something of a roué, while Malory's later Gawain is a rugged Orkney warrior whose implacable hostility to the Frenchman Lancelot is part of the schism that eventually scuppers the Round Table.

But the Gawain Poet's Gawain is a common or garden knight, over-rating his own knightliness, under-rating his true worth, a young man set in motion in a timeless world. Tellingly, the passage in which Gawain girds himself for his quest includes a detailed digression on the pentangle as symbolic of his five-times-five knightly virtues. The passage is full of little clear-the-throat asides: "I mean to tell you," "I find," "as I find," and:

> For it is a figure that has five points,
> And each line overlaps and locks into another,
> And everywhere it is endless, and the English, whenever
> They speak of it, call it the endless knot, as I do here.

This tentative air seems to foreshadow Gawain's eventual inadequacy, as if the burden is too heavy for him, the monumental past too much to live up to. The age is bygone, its ideals beyond us.

This alone would make him a peculiarly modern hero—he feels remarkably closer to us than, say, the twentieth-century Frodo Baggins in *The Lord of the Rings,* which was written by the first major editor of this poem; but the Gawain Poet's curious way with tenses is doing serious work behind the scenes. For it is this tendency to depict Gawain's quicker motions and choices in the present, with the unchanging material of the Arthurian world set back in its immortal past, that makes a man of Gawain, makes him clear to us and dear to us. He exists in an extra dimension, an illusory present where we can hear him breathe, so that we feel we might, through him, affect the situation: "Let him lie there still,/So close to what he came for . . . " "You will have your way with me, and I like the thought of that . . . "

The effect is curiously like that of playing a computer game, at least one of the obsolete generation where only one thing at a time could be animated. Perhaps it is no accident that many such games take place in a pseudo-medieval setting. While Gawain tosses and turns in the present moment, an immense panorama ripples unalterably behind him. All this makes for an exhilarating sense of free will struggling with powerlessness, and, given the context of Gawain's experience, bound by conventions, trapped by a game, threatened by a beauty, this serves the poem magnificently.

Time, in its mercy, has brought to us both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Canterbury Tales* more or less intact, though somewhere along the way it lost the label on one of them. If Chaucer, for the breadth of his humanity, for the sheer volume and vitality of his world, must finally take the laurels of England south again until the next time, what are we to award the Gawain Poet? In the light of how a strange and apparently carefree habit, that of ranging from past to present throughout the narrative, brings such extraordinary new life to an old world, animating a recognizable human creature against an eternal backdrop, I would nominate the author of this poem for the award—to be collected by W. S. Merwin—for best original screenplay, because screenplay is what poets do, too, and in this case the word seems richer than ever. ■

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Déjà Vu

THOUSANDS OF MILES FROM Iraq, a familiar story line is unfolding. There is the presidential warning to disarm or else; the last gasp diplomacy; the military buildup; and, ominously, images of international monitors hurriedly boarding airplanes. The White House may have hoped that America's victory in Iraq would send a signal to the rest of the world, but some leaders are divining a very different message from the one President Bush intended. Indonesia, for instance, has just launched its own shock-and-awe campaign, a massive military assault intended to squash—once and for all—a festering rebellion on the tip of Sumatra. It's even embedding journalists, Pentagon-style, calculating that what worked for Washington will work for Jakarta. Aceh, though, is not Iraq. It is not open desert but dense jungle—ideal terrain for a guerrilla war. And the Free Aceh Movement, which has been waging just such a war for the past 27 years, is neither shocked nor awed by Jakarta's muscle-flexing. To the contrary, it is digging in for another round of bloodletting. The ripples of U.S. precedent travel far but, it seems, do not always travel well.

ACEH IS A SMALL WAR—ONE OF SEVERAL dozen simmering around the world at any moment—but Small Wars only look small from a distance. Up close, they are every bit as brutal as Big Wars. At a makeshift refugee center, I meet a young woman who tells me her house was burned down. "Who did it?" I ask. "Persons Unknown," she replies. That's something you hear a lot in Aceh. Persons Unknown have burned down houses, raped women, killed children. Persons Unknown might be Indonesian soldiers or the rebels. Nobody knows, or no one is willing to say.

AN ACEHNESE EDUCATED IN THE UNITED States—I'll call him Achmed—explains the Acehnese character to me over a meal of shockingly spicy food. He boasts that Aceh was the one Indonesian region the Dutch colonizers never fully subdued. That rebellious spirit, he says, lives on today. "If you treat us with respect, we can be the warmest, most welcoming people," he says, "but, if you fuck with us, we can make your life truly miserable." A few minutes later, the power cuts out, and we continue our conversation in pitch black, but Achmed doesn't miss a beat; clearly, he's used to this. Although Aceh is flush with oil and natural gas and should be one of the richest provinces in Indonesia—with power to burn—the profits from all that oil (not to mention coffee and, the other big Acehnese export, marijuana) have been diverted to Jakarta. This, says Achmed, is what the Acehnese mean when they say they are fighting for justice.

ARAB TRADERS FIRST LANDED IN ACEH as early as the eighth century, according to some historians, and to this day the region retains a more Islamic flavor than the rest of Indonesia. That's why Aceh is known as "The Verandah of Mecca." Alcohol is technically banned, and most women wear the *jilbab*, the Southeast Asian version of Islamic garb. A sign in my hotel room admonishes me not to indulge in gambling, prostitution, or, inexplicably, to consume "fruits with strong smells." But this is not Saudi Arabia. My minibar is stocked with beer, and Acehnese women often complement their Islamic headscarfs with a pair of tight-fitting jeans.

SUHARTO, THE DICTATOR WHO BRUTALLY ruled Indonesia for more than 30 years, had no interest in public relations and would likely have scoffed at the notion of embedding reporters with military units. But this is the age of reform, and the Indonesian military is eager to burnish its image. So 54 Indonesian journalists recently endured a four-day training course in the jungles of Java and are now being deployed with military units in Aceh. This is Pentagon-style press management but with a twist: The Indonesian reporters are being issued military uniforms. A rebel spokesman declared ominously that reporters embedded with the military "would be viewed as not adhering to the principles of independent journalism." As Berni Moestafa, an embed from *The Jakarta Post*, says, "That sounds like a threat to me."

THE CONFLICT IN ACEH IS ALMOST A guerrilla war cliché. There's the charismatic rebel leader, Abdullah Syafei (killed in January 2002); the human rights abuses; the broken promises; the orphans; and the amputees. The conflict has festered for nearly three decades, because a guerrilla war in motion tends to stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force. For a while, it looked like that outside force might be the United States, which leaned heavily on President Megawati Sukarnoputri to negotiate with the rebels. But to no avail. Hours after peace talks aimed at salvaging a December 2002 cease-fire collapsed, Megawati's air force fired rockets at rebel positions. The government arrested five of the rebel leaders it was supposedly negotiating with, leaving the world to wonder if Indonesia is using diplomacy backed up by the threat of force—or force backed up by the cover of diplomacy.

WHATEVER PRESSURE WASHINGTON MAY have once imposed on Jakarta to make peace in Aceh has been buried by more pressing post–September 11 imperatives. After a slow start, Indonesian police have won U.S. approval by cracking down on the terrorist ring behind the bombing of two nightclubs in Bali last year. And, after its invasion of Iraq, the United States cannot easily condemn preemptive strikes against secessionist rebels (read: terrorists). In fact, Indonesia's foreign minister, Hassan Wirajuda, invoked Iraq to defend his country's military strikes in Aceh, noting that Indonesia's use of force is "much less than the American power that was deployed in Iraq. We aren't violating anyone's sovereignty." For the Indonesian government, maintaining their country's unity—physical unity, that is—is their first and only priority. Territorial integrity is for Indonesia what cultural integrity is for France. If Aceh is allowed to break away, Indonesian generals fear, it will inspire other separatist movements, and before long the country will disintegrate.

IT MIGHT SOUND PARANOID, BUT THERE is some basis for this fear. Indonesia, like the United States, is culturally diffuse, held together by an idea as much as anything else. Four years ago, Indonesia lost East Timor, though it was not really theirs in the first place; the United Nations never recognized Indonesia's 1976 annexation of the former Portuguese colony. When it comes to Aceh, though, Indonesia has international law on its side. The province has always been a part of Indonesia and, as far as Jakarta is concerned, always will be. No wonder ordinary Acehnese are so gloomy about the future. They've seen this movie before, and they know how it ends. **ERIC WEINER**

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Bush's Armies of Compassion Are Inching Forward

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During the 2000 campaign, George W. Bush promoted enabling faith-based organizations eligible for government funding. Given other concerns, however, such as the war on terrorism, the push for faith-based organizations (FBOs) has progressed slowly. Yet there are signs that FBOs are gaining momentum.

Since the 2000 campaign, President Bush has created the framework for "Armies of Compassion" to help meet social needs, using his bully pulpit to preach for partnerships between the federal government and FBOs. In December 2002, Bush signed two Executive Orders designed to benefit FBOs. The first announced new Federal Emergency Management Agency actions eliminating discriminatory practices against faith-based groups in disaster relief efforts. The second opened two new Faith-Based and Community Initiatives offices.

But what happened to Bush's faith-based legislation? Before the congressional elections, Bush's faith-based legislation (the CARE Act) sailed through the House but stalled in the Senate, in part because of former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle's maneuvering. With a new Republican Senate in place, it was assumed that the CARE Act would be guaranteed a place on the floor; but the legislation stalled once again. On April 9, however, the Senate passed a new version of the CARE Act by a vote of 95-5.

In relation to FBOs, Senate bill S. 476 calls for $12.7 billion in tax breaks for charitable giving and provides $150 million annually for a Compassion Capital Fund to assist community groups. Although, the controversial "equal treatment language"—which would have prohibited the government from requiring FBOs to remove religious art or scripture from areas where they provide social services, alter their charters, and/or alter religious qualifications for board membership in order to receive federal funds—was removed. This language would also have protected FBOs that received federal funds from antidiscrimination hiring laws. S. 476 is a step in the right direction, but was not all President Bush had hoped for.

While slow to mobilize in Washington, the president's Armies of Compassion are advancing elsewhere. The Hudson Institute recently released a report that studied fifteen states that have contracted with religious organizations to offer services. According to the report, which compared its results with its study of nine states conducted in 2000, there has been an upswing in contracting between government entities and FBOs.

The report revealed the following: (1) Since 2000, the number of financial contracts in eight of the nine original states has increased. In California the number of contracts increased from 11 to 107. (2) More churches are now involved in government contracting. Out of 587 faith-based organizations listed in 2002, 22 percent were churches (vs. 501c3 nonprofit organizations); in 2000, only 3.5 percent of the FBOs contracting with the government were congregations. (3) Of the nine states studied in both years, financial contracts increased more than tenfold. In 2002, contracts totaled $88 million; in 2000, they totaled $7.5 million.

Evidence suggests that the president has successfully used his pulpit to encourage partnerships between FBOs and the federal government. Thus far, however, Bush's audience outside the Beltway has listened and responded quicker than his Washington congregation. The passage of S. 476 should renew hope that Bush's message will affect all intended audiences, Washington included. Rumor has it that when the bill hits the House floor it will pass.

— Hanna Skandera

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